

THE NIGHT WE DIED

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FEBRUARY 1958 VOL. 32 NO. 2



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the Observatory

BY THE EDITOR

- It's being sounded from Maine to California that science fiction has come of age. We personally feel that it's the other way around; that science fiction has been of age for a long time and that the world is finally growing up. After all, we invented the atom bomb and launched dozens of *Sputniks* years and years ago. So we're pardonably proud when we hear so many people saying, "By golly! Maybe those boys have got something after all." If you're an old science fiction reader, you're no doubt as proud as we are. And if you're a new acquaintance we welcome you into the fold.

In case you're wondering what manner of magazine you've picked up, allow us to give you a quick definition of science fiction. It is a medium wherein the realities of tomorrow are successfully presented as today's fiction. Our critics, (and we have a few) when faced with case after case of accurate prediction, assert that we have become ineffectual because reality has caught up with us.

Don't believe it! Reality has but scratched the surface of possibility. In science fiction, the atom bomb is an antique; a cumbersome device resting in a museum while we explore the world of the future in which sonics, cybernetics, solar energy, and innumerable scientific progressions will surely bring about conditions undreamed-of even today.

Amazing has already moved far into the future and in order to do an even better job of "reporting" we are adding more pages and some startling new features. For additional information on the shape of things to come, please turn to page 130. And whatever you do, don't miss the next issue of *Amazing*.

-PWF

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Cover: EDWARD VALIGURSKY

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PAUL W. FAIRMAN

Managing Editor
CELE GOLDSMITH





...OR SO YOU SAY

BY THE READERS

Dear Editor:

In November Amazing Ivar's "Children of Chaos" was absolutely tops, and that fellow Darius John Granger was pretty good too.

I would like to see a small section devoted to latest unusual developments in science, such as the cryatrons, and that new type of highly heat-resistant glass they are eying as possible noses on I.C.B.M.s

I saw "Twenty Million Miles To Earth" and read the novel also. The movie can be classed as a good horror story but rotten s-f. The book wasn't too bad, but the sooner s-f and horror are separated the better. I would like to see more of Henry Slesar's stories.

I would agree that you have one hell of a job trying to pick the good stories from the bad, but all in all, you have good stories.

D. S. Mathison
152 Galley Ave.
Toronto, Ont., Canada

• As announced in this issue, we're doing something big about the science end of science fiction. We predict before very long, Dr. Barron will be one of the most widely discussed writers in the field.

Dear Ed:

Let's all the saucer fans build one and have some fun starting rumors. We will have to leave the anti-grav ships to their makers and build a refined helicopter. First, powerful fans for up and down, backward and forward. Proper shape is important too. It has to look like a saucer. We have to have air ducts for the concealed fans also. And last, a nice rounded cockpit for the pilot.

(Continued on page 125)



After a career of Facechange, a man began wondering



THE NIGHT WE DIED

By HENRY SLESAR

You live in the future; in an age when plastic surgery is a fine art. You tell the surgeon: "Make me look like Shan Kazar." But there is one danger; that you come out looking more like Kazar than the man himself.

AROUND the beginning of the Earth year, it became advisable for me to have a Facechange. I went to Harper, the best plastosurgeon this side of the interplanetary Code, and he fixed me up with a nice, long-jawed phiz, featuring a Barrymore nose, gray-flecked eyes, and sleek blond hair. It was my third Facechange since the first plastosurgery job was done in the Army hospital, and it's hard to remember what I looked like originally. But that's the penalty of my line of work; you meet a lot of strangers in your shaving mirror.

I particularly regretted this change, because it cut me out of the love life of the curvaceous singer at the Callisto Club. We were just getting to the high spot of our acquaintance when Captain Moffet of the Code Police traced me to Callisto with the intention of ending a notable career. Luckily, a friend of mine managed to warn me of Moffet's unpleasant intention, and I put the old suicide plan into action.

The suicide plan is reliable, but expensive. Fortunately, my last business transaction, involving the sale of a non-existent property called Moon-rock Mines, had netted me close to fifty thousand Earth dollars. I still had enough left to afford the black market body necessary to the plan. The Callisto surgeon who did the Facechange on the corpse was nowhere as skilled as Harper, but it didn't really matter—not after I put a fire-bullet into its temple. It still looked enough like me to fool the Code Police, and the radioed message to Code headquarters on Earth was eminently satisfactory. Don Murchis, swindler and confidence man, hopelessly trapped by the law, had died by his own hand. What it failed to

mention was that Murchis' successor, Toby Kane, had been born on Doc Harper's operating table in Maine, and was doing a lot of up-the-sleeve laughing at the gullibility of the Code Police.

To tell you the truth, I was a little surprised at how easy things went for me. Moffet is nobody's fool—he'd been dogging my trail for the last five years, and only Lady Luck's generosity had kept me out of his clutches. He was a real dedicated-type cop, and they are the worst kind. He was no civil servant; he was a fanatic. He even looked the part, like some latterday Savonarola, with thick white hair and fire in his eyeballs. He seemed to have made it a personal crusade to put me in mothballs. So far, all the breaks were mine.

But as I say, the tough part was saying farewell to my little Callisto songbird. She had developed quite a passion for Don Murchis, and was just about to prove it conclusively when the blow fell. I hated to think of the tears that would be flowing from her gorgeous eyes when she heard the news of Murchis' suicide.

However, I had other things to worry about. I left my dead double on Callisto and bought

my passage to Earth on a supply ship whose captain didn't ask too many questions. I headed straight for Harper's cozy little sanitorium on the seashore in Maine, and let the good doctor put me under the knife for the third time. The operation just about finished my nest egg; by the time the two-week recuperation period was over, I had less than two hundred bucks to my name. The day I said good-bye to Harper, I had no more prospects for the future than a jellyfish washed-up on shore.

I took a milk train into New York and holed up at the cheapest hotel I could find. I spent two days just lying on the creaking mattress, trying to concoct some new proposition to put me back in the moneyed class. But my head was still aching, and my brain wasn't functioning right. And I started having those dreams I used to have in the Army hospital, those lousy distorted nightmares full of flames and screaming women and shrilling bombs. They didn't help any.

On the third day, the desk clerk called me to the down-stairs telephone.

"Who, me?" I said, blinking at him. "Nobody knows me here."

"Just the same," the old guy growled. "Somebody's askin' for Toby Kane. That you or ain't it?"

I picked up the phone and waited to be surprised. I was, because the voice on the other end belonged to Sam Thumbs.

I hadn't seen Thumbs for three years, and never felt pangs of regret. He was a funny, bulldog-faced kind of guy with a sort of innocent pudginess that made him useful for capers involving phony stock, corporation swindles, and the like. He was a pretty fair con man, but only when he left the thinking to wiser heads. He looked like the stereotype of the Tired Businessman, but he had the innards of a Casanova. He lived for women. Every dishonest dollar he made ended up on some woman's neck, wrist, or bank balance. And homely as he was, he never once had a Facechange. It was hard to believe, but Sam Thumbs was born looking that way.

"Sam?" I said into the phone. "How the hell did you know about me?"

He chuckled. "Just mutual friends, Don. I mean Toby. Got word from somebody on Callisto about you giving Mof-fet the slip again. That guy's

going to get awful tired of chasing you."

"He won't be chasing me anymore. Don Murchis is dead. He committed suicide. Finis."

"Sure," Thumbs laughed. "I get the idea. Only I was wondering if maybe Toby Kane could use a little loot. I figure he might be pretty strapped by now."

"You interest me, friend. But since when do you go in for charity?"

"I'm not talking about charity. I'm talking about work. I got a little project going that might interest you. Things have kind of bogged down, and I figured I might be able to use some experienced assistance. You interested, Toby?"

"Maybe," I said guardedly. "Suppose we talk about it?"

"Sure, just what I was going to suggest. I'm over on 90th Street, 200 East. Apartment J. Can you drop over now?"

"Why not?" I said. "Be seeing you soon."

After I hung up, I tried to imagine the kind of caper Sam Thumbs would be involved in. It was probably something Sam couldn't handle, or he wouldn't have bothered to cut me in. There wasn't much

brotherly love between Sam and me.

But I was in no condition to pick my playmates. Work was work, and I was at low tide. I cleaned my new face up a little, put on my best and only suit, and headed for the address he'd given me.

It turned out to be a posh joint; striped awning, epauledted doorman, private elevator, and everything nice. Sam hadn't done so badly since I saw him last.

He hadn't changed much. The face that gaped out of the doorway of his apartment was as pudgy and canine as ever.

"Murchis?" he said doubtfully.

"Correction. The name is Kane, Toby Kane."

I walked past him into the apartment and spread my long body all over his white-fur sofa. If he had any doubts about my identity, the sight of me sprawling there took care of them. There's no disguising six-feet-three of floppy arms and legs.

"For Pete's sake," Thumbs chuckled. "I never would have known you, pal. That guy Harper really knows his stuff."

"You ought to pay him a visit, Sam. Do you good."

"Not me," he growled. "No quack's layin' a knife on me."

And I do all right the way I am."

His eyes flickered to the bedroom door behind me, and I guessed that Sam hadn't been lonely before my arrival.

"Okay," he said. "Let's get down to it, Murchis. Or Whatever the hell you call yourself. The caper's real simple. You ought to know all about it; it's the phony stock deal."

"I practically invented it. Who's the sucker?"

"A rich old biddy, name of Sorenson. A widow. Her husband was a Major, killed during the Moon Revolt. He left her some two hundred grand when he died, and I almost had her convinced that she should invest it all in Saturn asteroid stock. I used that stuff about the secret discovery of precious minerals; you know how it goes. She was going to bite, when some crook moved in and killed the golden goose."

"What crook?"

"Some phony medium. Old lady Sorenson is a great believer in the spirit world, and this Madame Whats-her-name told her that her husband didn't approve of the investment."

"That's sad," I commiserated. "Maybe you can get to this medium and queer her act."

"I don't even know who she is. The old dame won't talk about it, not to me. I told her that this medium stuff was a lot of baloney. She got sort of upset with me about that, and won't tell me nothing."

I shook my head. "That's the trouble with you, Sam. You always give up too soon."

"Well, what could I do?"

"Maybe this medium has her own plans for Sorenson's dough. Maybe you could arrange some kind of split."

"But how? I don't even know her name!"

"There are ways to find out. Suppose you give me all the dope you have—"

The bedroom door opened, and I knew that Sam's girl friend was framed in the doorway by the way the light in his eyes went from twenty to a hundred-watt. I turned and had a look, expecting nothing more than the usual yellow-haired tart that Thumbs did business with. I was wrong. The woman was as appetizing a fruit cocktail as I'd seen in a long time. She had hair like honey, a mouth like ripe cherries, and a complexion like sweet cream. She was long in the legs and as sleekly muscled as a panther. And when she talked, her voice was a full-throated purr.

"Who's your friend, Sam?"

"Sorry, Fern." Thumbs began to sweat, and lick his lips, and tremble so much I thought it was a preamble to apoplexy. "This is the old friend I was telling you about. Don—I mean Toby Kane."

"Hello, Fern," I said, registering my appreciation.

"You can talk freely," Sam told me. "Fern's been working with me on this Sorenson project. She knows the whole story."

"As a matter of fact," the woman said, "I suggested that Sam get a little expert help. He was kind of stumped."

"Thanks," I grinned. "The opportunity came at the right time. I'm a little short on the money side."

"Give him a hundred, Sam."

"What?"

"Give him a hundred. Sort of a down payment."

Thumbs scowled, but his hand dove for his wallet. He handed me a bill.

"Now let's get down to the facts," I said.

I don't know why I was smiling so happily when I left Thumb's place. The interview had netted me nothing more than a measly C-note and some stray pieces of information.

I went back to the hotel and

got the desk clerk to shift me to a slightly better room, one with a private telephone. Then I got out the directory. My first job was to locate Mrs. Sorenson's medium friend, and I had to do it without meeting the widow face-to-face.

I found the listing: *Sorenson, E. H. (Mrs.) 1250 Park.*

Then I had an idea. Rich widows had their habits, and a prominent one is the Marscruise. It was practically mandatory for the bereaved and wealthy ladies to take the Marsliner off to the pleasures of the red planet, seeking solace, distraction, and sometimes, another husband. But I couldn't be absolutely certain that Sorenson, E. H. (Mrs.) followed the normal pattern.

I dialed her number. A maid answered.

"How do you do," I said. "This is the White Line Cruise Company. Is Mrs. Sorenson at home?"

The maid said no.

"What a shame. You see, we're very anxious to clear our records concerning Mrs. Sorenson's Marscruise. Would you happen to know the date of Mrs. Sorenson's cruise?"

The maid hesitated, and said she *thought* it was back in '32, but then it *might* have

been '33, since that was the year that she, meaning the maid, had had her gallstone operation. But then again—

"Thank you very much," I said. "You've been a great help."

I hung up the phone, went to the delapidated antique that served as a writing desk, and pulled up a sheet of paper. In a backslanted hand, I wrote:

Dear Mrs. Sorenson:

I don't know whether you will recall me, since ten long years have gone by since our last meeting. But I still remember with pleasure our delightful chats aboard the Marscruise, particularly concerning our mutual interest in the affairs of the spirit world. How refreshing it was to meet someone who shared my faith in the Great Beyond! When we became acquainted on the voyage back in 2032 (or was it '33? My memory for dates is simply terrible) perhaps I mentioned my dear wife. I am saddened to report that the poor woman passed on a few months ago, leaving a great void in my heart. However, recognizing the eternity of the spirit, I am not completely desolated. My one problem now is to locate a trustworthy medium who can bring my

dear Agnes back to me—if only temporarily—from the Other Side.

My dear Mrs. Sorenson, if I may presume upon so short a friendship, would you be so kind as to recommend a medium whom I might contact? I would be everlastingly grateful.

Thanking you kindly in advance, and with every good wish for success in this world and the next, I am,

*Respectfully,
Mndmdmm Carruthers*

I read the letter over and chuckled, wondering if I had laid it on too thick, and hoping that the blurred first name would help create the illusion that Mrs. Sorenson had indeed met this nice old gentleman on the Marscruise.

I sent the letter by Instant-post, and by eight that night, had my reply.

Dear Mr. Carruthers:

What a pleasure it was to hear from you. Indeed, I do remember our chats on the Marscruise, and think of you often.

I was grieved to hear of your wife's passing, and feel as you do that the parting is only physical.

I can heartily recommend the services of Madame Olivia

Nemo, of South Court Street, in New York City. She has greatly eased the burden of John's death.

Perhaps we will have the pleasure of meeting there someday soon.

The rest was routine. I contacted Madame Nemo's establishment by phone, and made an appointment to attend a spook-hunt the following evening.

Madame Nemo's haunts turned out to be a relatively plush penthouse on the east side. The crowd of believers was thin when I arrived, and I made a point of placing myself well to the rear of the dimly-lit room where the medium did her stuff. The services didn't hold any surprises. I had attended these spirit-fests before, and there was no novelty in the performance. Madame Nemo, well swathed in filmy veils, sat behind a simple table before a black velvet curtain. The lights were dimmed, and the usual parade of ghost trumpets, dancing lights, table raps, and other hokum took place. Then the Madame sent her other-world contacts into the Great Divide, to place her calling cards with the assorted dear departeds of her audience. Three of them re-

sponded: an old space captain whose widow wanted to know if he approved of her remarrying (he said yes) a whisper-voiced woman named Aunt Grace, who advised her surviving sister to guard her health, and a young child named Harold who told his mother that he was very happy, even without television.

All in all, it was a dull performance, and I'm sure I could have done better. When the meeting broke up, I lingered to talk to the Madame.

"How do you do," she said, not looking at me. "I trust you found some solace in tonight's meeting?"

"It was fun," I said. "Only I really didn't get what I was after, Madame Nemo. You see, I'm a friend of Mrs. Sorenson's, and I was hoping we could contact the Major."

"I see. Unfortunately, Mrs. Sorenson couldn't be with us this evening—"

"I realized that. But my problem is this, Madame Nemo. I understand that Mrs. Sorenson has been offered an opportunity to invest some money in asteroid shares, and knowing something of the business, I consider the investment sound. However, Mrs. Sorenson tells me that her husband doesn't agree

with me. I was hoping to contact him, and argue the point—in a business-like sort of way. Do you suppose that could be arranged?"

"That is hard to say, Mr.—"

"Carruthers."

"Yes. That is hard to say, Mr. Carruthers. One cannot always dictate to the forces Beyond."

I looked at the medium closely, but the thick barricade of veils didn't give a hint of her expression. It was hard to tell what her game was, so I decided on the direct approach.

"Let me put it this way, Madame Nemo. I would be very pleased to make any financial arrangement necessary to convince Mrs. Sorenson that this investment is worthwhile. Now I know you can't bribe the spirits, but it occurs to me that your work is so important, so vital, that it must require a great deal of funds to keep it going. If I make myself clear."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Carruthers. I cannot control the wishes of those who have passed on. I don't operate that way."

"Suit yourself, Madame Nemo. But if you refuse to consider my suggestion—"

"I do."

"Then I wouldn't be sur-

prised if you lost a good client. Good night, Madame Nemo."

I telephoned Sam Thumbs the moment I arrived at my hotel.

"Inspiration, Sam," I said. "Your problems are over."

"You know what time it is?" he growled.

"Time for you to think about making a living. I've got a plan that'll make Mrs. Sorenson change her mind. The only thing I want from you is fifty per cent. Answer yes or no."

There was a pause. "Yes," Thumbs said.

"Okay. Then I want you to get hold of your pigeon tomorrow and tell her you found a much better medium than Madame Nemo."

"You're off the beam. Mrs. Sorenson thinks the sun rises and sets on Madame Nemo."

"Maybe so. But ask her if Madame Nemo was ever able to actually bring her husband back—in person. I don't mean just the voice, or a little whisp of ectoplasm. I mean the whole article."

"I don't get you, Murchis."

"The name's Kane. You ask her that question. If she says no—and she will—tell her you know a guy who can do it."

"What guy?"

"Shan Kazar is his name.
Also known as Toby Kane."

"Are you drunk?"

"Sober as the judge that'll hang you. Now do as I say, and let me know if the fish bites. I'll handle the rest."

I hung up, feeling pleased with myself. It was good to be back in action again.

In the morning, I went to see Phil Diggs of the War Department. Phil was my ace in the hole, and I knew he would come in handy the minute I heard that Sorenson's hubby had been a Major.

Diggs and I had met in the Army hospital twelve years ago. We shared a side-by-side bed for almost six months, while the medics tried to do something about my lack of face, and the Army psychiatrists had tried to restore what was left of my sanity. I was pretty much of a mess, but it gave me one advantage. I had been so wrapped up in bandages that Diggs never did know what I looked like, and my battle scars were a good excuse for any gaps in conversation.

I found out that Diggs was now a Colonel. When I walked into his office, I discovered him in battle position, manning a large oak desk, his pen

loaded and ready to fire. He had gotten chunky during his years as an armchair soldier. He really filled the chair.

He blinked when I walked in, and claimed to be George Spanner—the name the Army called me.

"Guess it must be a shock," I grinned. "You never did see the result of all that plastic surgery, did you, Phil? What do you think of it?"

"Looks great," he said, swallowing hard. "And how is—I mean—"

"My mind? Couldn't be better. I'm the best-balanced type you ever met these days, Phil. And how've things been with you?"

"Oh, can't complain," he said, looking guilty. Diggs always looked guilty. During the days of the Moon Revolt, he had managed to avoid a moment's contact with the enemy. It wasn't deliberate on his part; it was just dumb luck. On the day of his arrival from Earth, he had exploded a mortar accidentally and wounded both feet. He spent the rest of the war on his back in the Army hospital. By the time he was ready to be returned to active duty, the Revolt was over.

"Well, what can I do for you, George?" he said. I could tell from the tone of his voice

that I wouldn't have any trouble.

"Well, it's a kind of delicate business, Phil. If you don't feel you can help, why, just say the word and I'll get out of here."

"Tell me about it."

So I told him. The story I had concocted sounded thin when I dreamed it up yesterday, but it didn't sound so bad now. And besides, Phil was too flabbergasted by my visit to be sharp on the details. It was a hodgepodge, involving the fact that my dear friend, Mrs. E. H. Sorenson, who had practically mothered me since my leaving the hospital, was threatened with imminent insanity, and the only hope offered by the headshrinkers was for her to get one more glimpse of her dear departed husband, Major Sorenson. Phil still looked baffled at the conclusion of this tearjerking tale, so I laid the facts on his oak table.

"Phil, it's this way. Remember, during the Revolt, on how they insisted on Electronic-Images identifications made for all commissioned officers? Those three-dimensional projection things?"

He nodded. "I remember. The rebels were doing a lot of impersonation stuff, get-

ting behind our lines. Very sneaky."

"Right. Well, I figured that if I could get my hands on Major Sorenson's E-I—just borrow it, you understand—I could help poor Mrs. Sorenson an awful lot. Those things were uncanny; you remember. You could swear the person was in the same room with you."

Phil scratched his head.

"Gee, I dunno, George. That was a long time ago. All the records are down in the vaults of the Pentagon. It'll be quite a trick to dig it out now."

"But you could do it, couldn't you? As a matter of fact, you could probably requisition the reel today without anybody raising an eyebrow. Couldn't you?"

"I suppose so," he said tentatively. "I have a good friend in Personnel—"

I grinned. "Well, you do what you can, Phil. It's not for myself I'm asking. But I owe a lot to that sweet old lady."

I could swear his eyes were blurring with tears. What with old war-time memories and sweet old ladies and all, I had struck a wellspring of sentimentality in Phil Digg's chunky soul.

"I'll do my best, George.

Call me tomorrow, and I'll let you know."

We shook hands gravely, and I left.

By the time I reached my hotel, I was chuckling pretty hard at Digg's blubbery reaction, but when the door closed behind me, the chuckles dried up, and left a peculiar ache. I couldn't diagnose the pain, but it struck me that the only cure would be a ramble through some of the souvenirs in my trunk. I dragged it out from under the bed, and the damn thing almost fell apart in my hands.

Under the spare shirts and underwear, there was a yellowed envelope containing the only authentic records I had ever owned in my life. It was a long time since I had undone the flap and looked inside. I spilled the contents on the bed and looked them over. There wasn't much to see: an honorable medical discharge certificate, a printed citation for participation in the Moon Revolt action, a purple heart, and a letter. The letter was written by Pfc Douglas Farah, a kid of twenty who died in the adjoining bed of the Army hospital ward, and it was meant to be delivered to his sweetheart. I had never delivered it, because Farah's

sweetheart had married three months before his death, and I didn't think she deserved to own it. I knew the damned letter by heart, and all it expressed was Doug Farah's bafflement as to what the whole bloody war was about.

A lot of people were baffled about that war, so Doug wasn't so unusual. Everybody knew the basic facts, of course. The Moon colonists, a comparative handful of men, had suddenly gotten nutty ideas about independence. It didn't make sense, of course. There were less than a hundred thousand families on the Moon, and they had been settled there less than fifty years. But they were as hipped on the subject of independence as the American colonists were three hundred years before. They used slogans and symbols and rallying cries right out of the Revolution. They acted as if they owed nothing to Earth; as if they were a nation separate and apart. It was screwy; it was pure insanity; and what's more, it was dangerous. Because the Moon was an arsenal, a storehouse for banned atomic weapons, a bomb that could have exploded half the solar system.

Everybody thought the war would be a rapid police action,

a quick saber-rattling business. It wasn't. The presence of the atomic stockpile on the satellite made all-out warfare impossible. That meant land troops. And if there was one art the Moon colonists had learned in their fifty years of settlement, it was the art of defending their naked, airless, arid soil. Force of numbers didn't mean a thing. The rebels gave the Earth forces hell.

The war lasted two years. It might have ended sooner, except for a similar, sympathetic outbreak on Mars. But there was less hesitation about the use of bomber-rockets on the red planet; there were no atomic stores to worry about. But the Mars colonists, like those of the Moon, fought grimly and relentlessly. They were the first to surrender, but the cost in lives reached a figure nobody even likes to mention today.

As for the Moon rebels, nobody knows how the war really ended. A few days after the surrender of the Mars forces, the leaders of the Moon insurrection were discovered in the crater Aristarchus, all dead by their own hands. This mass suicide gave everybody the creeps, but it succeeded in taking the fight out of the Moon rebels. A few

days later, a cease-fire was declared and the bloody crusade for independence was abandoned.

Nobody seems to think much about the Moon Revolt these days. The only reminder of the past is the statue of Arego, the leader of the Moon forces, erected at the base of Aristarchus. It's a funny thing. Until the moment of his suicide, Arego was probably the most hated man on Earth. But after the Revolt was over, he became a sort of cockeyed hero, a legendary and romantic figure. I guess you can call it sentiment.

As for myself, I don't remember much about the Revolt. I was about nineteen when the fire-bullet caught me in the face and burned away my features and half my mind. I went through a year of living hell and recurring nightmares, while they patched me up into the semblance of a human being. By the time I got out of the hospital, I couldn't care less about the Moon Revolt or Arego or Right or Wrong or anything. All I cared about was taking the best possible care of Number One, and I had stuck to that philosophy ever since. With no regrets.

I shoved the papers back in

the envelope, and picked up the telephone.

"Toby?" Sam Thumbs said. "Was just gonna call you."

"Good for you. Did you see Mrs. Sorenson?"

"That's what I wanted to tell you. She's real curious about this Shan Kazar business. Says Madame Nemo never really let her *see* her husband. Can you really do it, Toby?"

"Of course I can. I'm the boy wonder, remember? Only it may take a few days. Keep her interested, Sam. I'll handle the rest."

Diggs did his best, and his best was pretty good. By the end of the week, a messenger arrived from the War Department with an unmarked container, and a brief note from Phil. The note gave me the details on how to obtain an E-I projector on loan from Army surplus. The container held a reel of four-sided film.

I got my hands on the projector the next afternoon, and brought the whole setup to Sam Thumbs apartment. Panther Lady was stretched out on the white-fur sofa when I arrived, looking interesting. But I didn't have time to appreciate the effect. I called Sam out of the bedroom, and we set up the equip-

ment. We draped a sheet over a doorway, drew the blinds, and flicked off the lights. Fern came around to the other side of the projector and did a little suggestive breathing on my neck. I pushed her away, and we ran off the film.

It was eerie. Not many people, outside of Army staff, ever saw one of these electronic projections, and the effect was enough to straighten the short hairs. You can have sworn that the dumpy, pot-bellied officer was standing in the same room, big as life and real enough to make a shavetail quiver. He had a face the color of a half-ripe tomato, with an abbreviated moustache that hung limply over a receding chin. He stood with his arm akimbo, and then shifted uncomfortably from one foot to another. His narrow chest was weighted with decorations, and his booted legs were ludicrously flimsy. There was something comic-opera about Major Sorenson, except for a certain steely assertiveness in his cool gray eyes. We watched his static performance in silence, almost as if we were afraid that the Major would overhear the plot we planned against his wife. Then I shut off the machine.

"Amazing," Thumbs said,

grinning foolishly all over his fat face. "That'll knock her eyes out."

"What about the voice?" Fern said. "How'll you duplicate that?"

"We won't even try," I said. "I'll slip a mike into my costume, and we'll pipe my speech through a filtered speaker. It'll sound otherworldly enough to be convincing."

"I got to hand it to you, Toby," Thumbs said. "You really use your head."

"Let's not count our chickens before they're plucked. Set up a date for tomorrow night with Mrs. Sorenson. Then we'll see."

Fern walked me to the door, and said good-bye with a look that carried an invitation Thumbs wouldn't like much. I wasn't too reluctant to accept it, but I decided to play it cagey for a while. I just frowned, and said good-bye.

I met another stranger in my shaving mirror the next night, but it was only temporary. I attached a pair of shaggy eyebrows and a rust-colored moustache to my face. A little putty in the nostrils, a pair of plate-glass spectacles, a turban, and I was ready to be introduced to E.

H. Sorenson (Mrs.) as Shan Kazar, oriental mystic and medium *par excellence*.

When I reached Thumbs's place, I found everything in readiness for the performance. Thumbs would act as host, I would be the star attraction, and Fern would run the equipment from a concealed station behind a curtain. We had another dress rehearsal, and it went off by the numbers. Panther Lady was not only beautiful, she was efficient. Again, I had to wonder how Sam Thumbs had ever enticed such a paragon into his chubby arms. It certainly wasn't his good looks.

Around eight o'clock, the doorbell rang. Thumbs answered it, and returned with his hand on the elbow of a tallish, matronly woman in her late fifties. I thought Mrs. Sorenson would turn out to be the clubwoman type, but she was more than that. There was a forcefulness in the way she shook hands and greeted us, and the steely glint in her eyes was a good match for the hard glow we had seen in the eyes of her dead husband.

"And this," Toby said uncouthly, "is Shan Kazar."

I bowed.

"Mr. Kazar?" She looked doubtful. "The name has an

oriental sound. But you don't look—"

"An inheritance of my father," I said glibly. "He was an Eurasian. My mother was an expatriated White Russian, living in Shanghai. She, too, was gifted; I believe I owe my powers to her."

The explanation seemed to satisfy her. She took a chair, and we began the show.

I took my time about getting down to the essential business, knowing the importance of the build-up. I did a lot of mumbling and stuff, and gave a pretty good imitation of entering the trance state, even to the point of foaming a little at the mouth. Then we let her have the feature film.

I had shown Fern how to focus in slowly on the image, so that the appearance of Major Sorenson's supposedly spectral image would take place with proper mystery. She handled it beautifully. First there was a blur of color, and then a gradual solidification of form, until finally the old boy himself stood revealed to us, as solid-looking as the widow. As for Mrs. Sorenson, her muffled gasp at the Major's apparition signalled the success of our venture.

Then I started my spiel. The voice groaning out of the

filter sounded eerie enough to satisfy the most particular ghost-hunter, and while my recitation would never win prizes at a Shakespeare festival, it was still pretty competent.

"*Edith . . .*" I droned. "*Edith, my darling . . .*"

"John!" She clasped her hands to her bosom and took a step toward the electronic image. Thumbs put a restraining hand on her arm, cautioning her not to break the trance.

"*Edith, my sweet,*" I said. "*I am well and happy. I have found peace here . . .*"

"John! John, where are you? What is it like? Oh, please tell me."

"*Do not ask me such questions, Edith. I am not permitted. Your answers must wait, my darling, until the day you and I can be together again . . .*"

I gave her a little more of the kind of stuff that Madame Nemo dished out, and then maneuvered the conversation around to Topic A.

"*You must be cautious, Edith. You must guard your health and your finances. You must take care of the money I left you . . .*"

"Yes, John, yes!"

"*You must invest the*

money, Edith. You must invest it wisely . . .”

“But where, John? You told me, at Madame Nemo’s—”

“NO!” I made the voice boom out like the thunder of Jove. “Do not believe that woman! She is an imposter. This is the first moment I have spoken to you from the Other Side.”

“And about the investment, John? Should I invest in those asteroid shares?”

I took a deep breath. “Yes, my sweet. I have ways of knowing its value. Invest, Edith . . . I have had a glimpse of Tomorrow. You will be wealthy; you will continue to have the earthly comforts I wish for you, until our day of reunion . . .”

That was the clincher. She wanted to go on chatting for a while, but I made out as if I had some important spiritual appointment. She didn’t make any fuss. We let the electronic image flicker and die, and then the lights shot up.

When the old lady left, Thumbs broke out his best whiskey, and the three of us spent the rest of the night celebrating in advance.

The next morning, I woke up to a hangover and two of

the rudest shocks I’d had since leaving Callisto. There was a hammering on the apartment door, and when I answered it, I found myself looking into the saintly-fanatical face of Captain Moffet.

For a second, all my famous aplomb deserted me, and I was as slack-mouthed as a kid with his hand in the cookie jar. Then I gathered up the loose ends of my nerves and recalled that Captain Moffet wasn’t interested in a blond guy named Toby Kane. Or was he?

“Mr. Kane? My name is Moffet. I’m a Captain in the Interplanetary Code Police.”

“Police?” I gave him an innocent stare.

“Nothing wrong, Mr. Kane. Not yet, anyway. May I come in?”

I let him in, and he parked on the edge of a chair.

“Mr. Kane, how long have you known Mr. Thumbs?”

“Me? Oh, about a month,” I lied. “I met him at a party, through a mutual friend.”

Moffet grunted. “That’s what I thought.”

“Why? What’s the trouble?”

“Mr. Kane, I’ll be honest with you. We ran a fast check on Mr. Thumbs’ associates and couldn’t find you among

them. So we figured you were a recent acquaintance of Mr. Thumbs, and possibly something more than that. Possibly, you're considering doing some business with him."

"Possibly. What's your interest?"

"Simply this, Mr. Kane. We happen to know that Sam Thumbs is a confidence man. He's been indicted for grand and petty larceny some four times in his career. He's never been sent to jail because his victims were too involved in his schemes to testify against him. But he's still a criminal, and he may be out to defraud you."

I could have laughed in Moffet's holy face. Imagine it! Warning me about little Sam Thumbs!

But I played it straight.

"Thanks very much, Captain. If what you say is true, I'll be careful."

"I'm giving you fair warning, Mr. Kane. If you want to get fleeced, that's your business. I'm a cop, not a social worker. But I thought you could use the warning."

"I promise," I said earnestly. "I'll be very cautious. And I want to thank you for your interest."

"It's no personal interest in you, Mr. Kane." Moffet

scowled. "It's Thumbs I'm interested in. I've made it my personal obligation to see that nobody gets taken by that sharpshooter. If I can't put him in jail, I'll see to it that he never smells a sucker's money. And that's all."

He got up, and slammed out of the room.

But the second shock was worse.

I was on my way over to Thumbs' place to tell him about Moffet's solicitous visit, when the telephone rang. It took me a while to recognize the frantic voice on the other end.

"Phil?" I said at last. "What's the matter?"

"Damn it!" Phil Diggs said. "I don't know how the thing got snafued, George. It wasn't my fault, honest; somebody in the Pentagon goofed. I hope it didn't ruin everything."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"That electronic-image film I sent you. I told 'em in plain language that I wanted this Major Sorenson. But they went and got the message all screwed up. How's the old lady? Is she okay?"

"Talk sense!" I said sharply. "What about the film?"

"It was the wrong one. It

was a Major Warrenburg, of the Sixth Infantry. He isn't even dead. He's retired, up in Nova Scotia someplace. Gee, George, I hope you don't blame me for—"

"It's okay," I answered quickly. "It's okay, Phil. The old lady didn't even know the difference. You see, her eyes really aren't so good, and she couldn't make out the figure too well. But she *thought* it was her husband, and that's all that mattered—"

Diggs gave a relieved sigh. "Gosh, I'm sure glad to hear that, George. I was worried sick when I found out the mistake. Do you still want the right reel?"

"No, thanks. It's not important now."

I hung up, and sat down on the edge of the bed.

I couldn't make sense out of the situation, no matter how much tussling I did with the facts. Was old lady Sorenson *really* near-sighted, and did she really think she was talking to her dear departed husband? I couldn't swallow the explanation. She was sharp-eyed enough to detect Shan Kazar's lack of oriental features.

Then what was the answer? Was she playing her own secret game? Was she pretending to go along with this

medium hoax for her own purposes?

I swore aloud at the next thought that crossed my mind. Maybe Mrs. Sorenson was working for the Code Police —maybe that visit from Captain Moffet was more than just a friendly warning. Maybe this was a trick to catch Sam Thumbs red-handed. If it was, then I was trapped in the same net!

I decided against telling Thumbs of my suspicions; I didn't want him to get panicky and run.

Instead, I paid a call on Mrs. Sorenson.

A maid answered the door of her Park Avenue duplex, and I recognized the voice of the woman who had given me the Marscruise information.

"I'm sorry," she said. "Mrs. Sorenson isn't feeling too well this morning. Can I take a message?"

The maid looked undecided, and then allowed me to wait in the foyer while she went off to relay the message.

I took the opportunity to prowl around.

There was a photograph on the piano. It was inscribed: "*To Edith, with all my love, John.*" The picture was that of a middle-aged Army officer with a grave face, a face that

bore no resemblance to the E-I projection we had shown the night before.

I still had the photo in my hand when the old lady walked in.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Spanner?" Her voice was frigid.

"Mrs. Sorenson? I was just looking at the Major's photograph. It's a fine likeness—"

"My husband was killed at the battle of Pluto Crater, Mr. Spanner. He was never brought to the Colorado Hospital. You couldn't have possibly met him there. Now just what is it you want of me?"

I could see this wasn't going to be easy.

"Mrs. Sorenson, I'll lay my cards on the table. I understand that you're interested in purchasing stock in the Saturnian Asteroid Company, and that you've been talking to a man named Sam Thumbs. Is that correct?"

"Who are you?"

"That's not important right now. The important thing is that I believe I can save you a great deal of money if you are interested in this investment. Do you want to talk about it?"

She relaxed a little. "All right. Say what you have to say."

I began to talk. I pretended that I was a rival of Thumbs, and could arrange for the stock purchase at a lower cost. I made a lot of tricky statements about buying on margin, and stuff like that. I didn't know where my own conversation was leading me, but I hoped it would unearth some clue as to Mrs. Sorenson's angle.

It didn't do any good. She was a cool customer, and all her answers were guarded. When I finally got up to leave, I hadn't learned any more than I knew when I walked in. But I was sure of one thing. The old lady was no sucker. She knew that the E-I projection was a phony, but she had gone along with the gag. That permitted only one explanation. Mrs. Sorenson was working with the Interplanetary Police.

I roused Thumbs from an afternoon nap and got him to meet me at a cafeteria around the corner.

"Now listen carefully," I said. "Where did you get the lead on old lady Sorenson?"

He blinked at me sleepily. "What's the difference?"

"Plenty of difference, pal. The difference between free air and prison air. Now where did you find this pigeon?"

He hesitated. "Through Fern," he said.

"What?"

"Yeah. I met Fern at a party a couple of months ago, and she got to like me. She knew a lot about the con game. Said she could lead me to a nice rich widow ready for plucking. I didn't see anything wrong about it."

I chewed my lower lip. Was Panther Lady part of the police trap too?

"How much do you know about Fern?"

"All I have to know, pal."

"Did it ever occur to you that she was working for the cops? Maybe for Moffet?"

"You're out of your head."

I got sore, and bunched up Thumbs' lapels beneath his pudgy throat. "Listen, fat boy. I've got a healthy notion about this whole setup. I think the whole business is a frame, a plot to snare you and me both. You told me that Fern suggested getting my assistance, didn't you?"

"Yeah, sure. I told her about you. She thought it would be a good idea, when we ran into that Madame Nemo snag."

I let him go in disgust. "Madame Nemo. Another phony. I wouldn't be surprised if Madame Nemo is

nobody else but Panther Lady."

"Who?"

"Your girl friend, Fern. I think the whole thing was rigged to trap us. Don't you see it? Why else would Mrs. Sorenson play along with us, when we showed her a picture of Major Warrenburg?"

"Major Who?"

Then I told him about Phil Digg's error. When he heard that, the little guy almost shook himself to pieces with fear.

"What'll we do, Toby?"

"We don't have to do a thing. Just forget about this little transaction of ours. If no money changes hands, then Moffet and the Code Police haven't got a case. Simple."

"But what if you're wrong, Toby? I mean, the old lady was gonna shell out a hundred grand—"

"I can't be wrong. There's no other explanation. If you want to go ahead with it, that's your business. But count me out from here on in. I'm not sticking my head in a noose."

When I left him in the cafeteria booth, Thumbs was looking sick.

I went back to my hotel room, cursing the fate that had cost me two profitless

months. My best bet now was to get as far from Thumbs, Moffet, Sorenson, and Panther Lady as I could. I'd work out my own schemes from now on.

I opened the door of my room, and found Fern sitting on the edge of my bed, pouring herself a drink from my only bottle of Scotch.

"Hello," she said brightly. "I was wondering when you'd get home."

"Who let you in?"

"Don't be ridiculous. You've got a very sweet desk clerk, Toby. Highly romantic."

She made an appealing picture, but I tried to keep my mood impersonal.

"What do you want, Fern?"

"Don't be so gallant. I don't want anything in particular. Just some company, a few laughs, a drink—and anything else you might suggest." She looked up at me meaningfully, and her eyes were like a picture-book.

"Some other time," I said. "I've got some business to take care of."

"You're not even courteous." She stood up and came to my side. "What is there about me you *don't* like?"

"Sam Thumbs, for one thing."

"Sam isn't here now."

"Don't you miss him?"

"Not a bit." She was too close for me to do anything else. I put my arms around her. Her mouth was scorching.

She pulled away from me.

"I still want that drink," she said. "How about you?"

"Sure."

She handed me the glass, and then poured another for herself. I knocked it back, and watched while she sipped her drink slowly, her eyes bright and insolent over the rim of the glass.

"That's enough," I said. I took the drink out of her hand and put it on the dresser. Then I pulled her to me again. I thought I heard her laugh before I stopped her mouth with a kiss. Her lips tasted bitter this time, and I couldn't understand why.

"How do you feel?" she said, her voice distant and muffled.

I couldn't answer. My fingers could no longer feel the smooth flesh of her arms. The flowery pattern of the wallpaper began to blur, the colors running and melting into each other. I knew I had been drugged, but instead of resentment and anger, I felt a strange sort of relief.

I went limp, and she caught me in her arms.

"Help me to bed, nurse," I said.

A firebullet is no bigger than a pea, and a battery of artillery can send millions of the deadly things at you in the space of a few seconds. Your asbestos-gear shields you against the majority of the bullets, but some travel at such force that even steel can't stop them. Those were the type that were pouring at me now, an incessant rain from Hell, a bombardment of spitting flames that licked at my flesh, ate away at my tissues, causing me to scream in anguish, to beg for a relief that never came.

Then there was peace. Peace and the comfort of darkness.

I opened my eyes.

"Eighteen hours and forty minutes," Captain Moffet said, towering over me like some archangel of Death, his white hair haloed by the light from the barred window. "You've slept a long time, my friend."

I shut my eyes, and thought bitterly of my betrayal.

"Must have been powerful stuff they handed you. Not enough to kill, however. We can both be thankful for that."

"Congratulations," I said

weakly, my voice a croak. I struggled to sit up. It didn't take long to get orientated to my surroundings. I knew what a prison hospital looked like.

"My only regret," Moffet said sadly, "is that we didn't catch them in the act. However, that may work out to our advantage."

His words weren't making sense. I said: "What the hell are you talking about?"

"I'm sorry," he said gently. "I guess you don't know what's happened. Your—friends drugged you. Don't ask me why. They must have had their reasons. Luckily, I've been keeping a tail on Thumbs and the girl for the past week. When I got the report about you, I sent my men to the scene. The girl got away, but I don't care about that. The important thing is—you're all right."

Then it hit me. Moffet hadn't set a trap. Fern and old lady Sorenson weren't working for the police. But why was I drugged? And why was Moffet so pleased about the way things had turned out?

He pulled a chair up beside my bed.

"Do you want to talk about it?"

"Talk about what? I don't

know any more than you do, Captain. But I guess you were right. They must have been trying to swindle me—”

He laughed. “Never mind that. I know all about *that*, Mr. Murchis.”

I didn’t blink an eye. “The name’s Kane.”

“You sure about that? I’d imagine you’d be pretty confused about your name by now. George Spanner, Harry Wilson, Don Murchis, Toby Kane—quite a cast of characters. I’ll admit you had me fooled. I really thought Murchis was dead. I never suspected you. And maybe I never would have, my friend—if you didn’t talk in your sleep.”

“What?”

“It’s a hell of a way to get a confession. But that’s what happened. You’ve spent a bad night, Kane. You’ve been having a nightmare that’s given us all the creeps. But you’ve also talked.”

“Then it wasn’t a trap? Sorenson, and the girl—you didn’t put them up to this?”

“No.” Moffet chuckled suddenly. “It’s a funny thing. I’ve been chasing you for five years, from Earth to Saturn. And then I catch you by trying to help you out of a jam. Funny.”

“Very,” I said dryly.

“Only now that I’ve got you—I’m willing to make a deal.”

I stared at him. “What kind of a deal?”

“Not the kind you’re thinking. I don’t want you to turn stool pigeon, Kane. I’ve got better ideas.”

I repeated the question with a little more emphasis.

Moffet stood up and went to the window.

“Let’s say it’s more than just a deal. Let’s say it’s a patriotic duty. Would that make it go down easier?”

“I doubt it.”

“Then let me put it in practical terms. If you’ll help me, Kane, I’ll help you. I’ll guarantee you a full amnesty for any past offense. I’ll see to it that you’re not prosecuted for any crime you’ve committed to date—and take my word, that’s a long, long list.”

“It’s *too* good. What’s the catch?”

“The catch is this. The assignment is difficult and dangerous. You’ll be working for the law—not just the Interplanetary Code Police, but a bigger Law. If you get caught, you’ll be killed. Make no mistake about that. But if you don’t get caught—and if you do the job I think you can do—you’ll have richly earned

your freedom. How does that sound?"

I couldn't keep the suspicion and distrust out of my answering gaze. But I said:

"I'll bite, Moffet. Let's have the details."

He smiled angelically, and walked to the barred window. The moon, a pale ghost of itself in the twilight sky, hung between the bars like a captive balloon. He looked up at it, and then at me.

"I'm going to tell you why Fern and Mrs. Sorenson had reason to be afraid of you, Kane. Why they'd be a lot happier to see you out of the way. Why they drugged you, and might have killed you, if my man hadn't gotten there first."

"All right. Why?"

"Because you must have found out too much. Because you must have stumbled onto something they wanted very much to conceal."

"What's that?"

"Their real identities."

I grimaced. This cloak-and-dagger routine wasn't palatable.

"It's the truth," Moffet said, grim-jawed. "We've had our eye on Sorenson and this Fern girl for several months. Because we suspect that they're members of the most dangerous subversive group

on Earth. We haven't been able to prove it; they're playing a cautious game. But we have good cause to think that they and others like them are preparing to commit treason."

"Treason? Against who?"

"Against the entire world. Against the planet Earth."

He looked at the moon again, and I twisted my mouth in disbelief.

"You're crazy. You mean they're plotting another Moon rebellion? Those two dames?"

"That's exactly what I mean. That kindly old lady, and that—interesting young woman. And God knows how many hundreds or thousands of others who are part and parcel of their plans. But it won't be the first time. It will only be a repetition of the madness that seized them a dozen years ago."

"What does that mean?"

"I mean that Fern and Mrs. Sorenson are not new to this idea. We believe now that they were closely related to the men we *thought* had died in the crater Aristarchus."

"Thought? I didn't know there was any question about it. You can even see their tombstones on the Moon—"

"That's correct. But now we've begun to doubt the

identities of the men buried beneath those headstones. Now we've begun to suspect that the Earth forces were victimized by a gigantic hoax during the Surrender."

"You mean they're *alive*? Arego and the others?"

"We don't know how many. Maybe only a handful—maybe all eighteen of the corpses we discovered that night were imposters. But we do know this. At least *some* of those dead faces were the result of posthumous plastic-surgery. The bodies of dead Moon rebels, serving the cause of their leaders even after death."

"Fantastic! And you think they're really plotting to start the whole thing again?"

"We're sure of it," Moffet said.

His grave face began to get blurry at the edges, and the room seemed unstable. I clutched the sides of the hospital bed, and the feel of the clean cool sheets had a terrible familiarity; the antiseptic walls of the room had a fearful significance. I had to fight the panic his words created in me; I thought I had shaken off the horror of those pain-wracked days in the Army hospital, but the threat of another Moon war showed me

how close I lived on the edge of the Past.

"You don't seem to like the idea much," Moffet grunted. "Well, neither do we. But perhaps we can prevent it. Perhaps you can *help* prevent it."

"Me? How?"

Moffet sat on the edge of my bed, and his grin was almost friendly.

"I know a lot about you, Kane. More than you probably think I know. I've learned to respect your ability, much as I hate to admit it. You're clever. You know how to handle yourself. Even in a dangerous situation."

"Thanks for the compliment. But I still don't know what you want me to do."

"I want you to continue to play the game you've been playing for the last ten years, Kane. Only I want you to play it on *our* team."

"Come again?"

"I want you to continue to be a swindler and a cheat, a liar and a pretender. Only I want you to victimize a certain special group of suckers. It's a group of people we've been observing closely for the last eight months. We know their habits. We know their friends. We know everything except their plans for the Moon. That's what we want *you* to find out."

"But how?"

"By another Facechange, Kane. An official one, this time."

He got up and went to the bureau at the far wall of the hospital room. There was a brief case lying on top. He opened it, and extracted a glossy photo.

He tossed it in my lap.

"We want you to look like him."

I stared at the photograph. It was the portrait of a young man with dark hair and brooding eyes. His jaw was smooth, as if the beard hadn't started to appear. He might have looked almost boyish, except for the burning intensity of his gaze.

"Looks vaguely familiar, but I can't place him. Who's your friend?"

"I don't know his first name. He stopped using it a long time ago. But he became famous under the name of Arego."

"Arego! You want me to look like *him*?"

"Exactly. No one could be more welcome to these people I mentioned. No one could learn more from them than their former leader. We know he hasn't shown up yet; we've been waiting for that moment ourselves. With a

little coaching, we think you can carry it off."

"You're out of your mind," I said. "I couldn't fool them for a minute. Just one wrong word, and my head would be in a noose."

"We'll see to it that you don't use the wrong word. We've got a dossier about Mr. Arego that's three-feet thick. We've collected more facts about this guy than ten biographers could in their lifetimes. If you're willing to take this assignment, your first duty will be to cram yourself full of these facts until you know them as well as you know your own—" He stopped, and grinned. "Well, not your own name. You've had too many of those, my friend."

"But what happens if Arego shows up? All the cramming I could do wouldn't prevent his friends from knowing which was the real Arego and which the imposter."

Moffet shrugged. "We'll try and guard you against that possibility. But I wouldn't try and kid you, Kane—if it happens, you're a dead man. If any of a dozen things happen, you've had it. That's a gamble you'll have to take. We'll make it as foolproof as we can, but we're not promising anything more than a fight-

ing chance. And freedom if you succeed."

I rubbed a hand up and down my Barrymore nose.

"I'm hardly used to *this* face yet," I said.

Moffet looked happy.

It was three months before Moffet was able to put his scheme into action. The actual Face change took only a week; the recuperation took less than two weeks. But the tough part was educating me to think, talk, and *feel* like the insurrectionist, Arego. Moffet had been right about the file; it held more facts about this one man than I thought possible to collect. And more facts than I thought it possible for me to memorize.

But I tried. I crammed night and day for weeks on end. Even in my sleep, a Somnabox droned away in my ear, trying to instill every known fact about Arego into my brain. It was hard going. Sometimes, I threatened to quit. Once, I punched my instructor on the jaw and had to be cooled off by four Code guards. I've had some tough moments in my life, but I think nothing will ever compare to that course of education Moffet subjected me to.

And finally, they were sat-

isfied. I looked like Arego; a little older than the photograph he had showed me; a little taller, perhaps; a little less passionate intensity in my eyes. But these were differences that Moffet believed no one would detect. He was satisfied with his creation.

"You'll fool 'em, Kane," he said. "I'm sure of it. They'll be so glad to see you that they'll be blinded to the minute differences. After all—it's been years since they saw you last. And they have an important mission for you now—to be the figurehead of their new revolt."

"And when do I get to know who 'they' are?"

Moffet grinned. "Right now. Today."

He handed me a typewritten list. It contained the names and descriptions of seven men.

"These are the names we secured from an informant almost a year ago. All of them are former Moon-colonists who left the satellite shortly after the Surrender to start life anew on Earth. None of them has ever been directly connected with the leaders of the Revolt, but there is no question about where their sympathy was during the war. Now the question is—what are their plans? How

many sympathizers have they enlisted? What are their tactics? When is their target date? Those are the questions we hope you can answer for us, Kane. And I'd suggest you start with the man whose name heads the list."

I looked at the sheet again. The lead name was:

DR. SELWYN ZERN. Psychiatrist in private practice, chief consultant to Pickering Clinic, hospital for mental ailments in Collins, Georgia. Age, 47.

"Our informant seems to think that Dr. Zern is top dog in the new rebellious movement. However, we are not certain."

I said: "And who is this informant?"

"It doesn't matter. His usefulness is over; he killed himself last March."

"And how do you propose I meet this man Zern?"

"I leave that to your ingenuity," Moffet smiled. "But if he's the man we think he is, he'll be more than happy to make your acquaintance."

"When do I start?"

"This very moment," Moffet said, walking to the door.

A prison guard unlocked it and I was free.

In the first few hours of my

new freedom, I toyed with thoughts of escape.

Then I knew that I had no other choice. I had to go through with this plan of Moffet's. It wasn't patriotic fervor that motivated me; it was the promise of amnesty. I had suddenly decided that I was tired of running, and the offer of total absolution of my crimes was too tempting to ignore.

My first act was to call Dr. Zern's office. The nurse that answered the phone had a friendly, chirping voice.

"My name is Duncan," I said. "I'd like to make an appointment with Dr. Zern, if I could. As soon as possible."

"I see. May I ask what the trouble is?"

"I'd rather not talk about it. Is Dr. Zern free today?"

"I'm afraid not. However, perhaps I can find a free hour for tomorrow morning. Is that all right?"

"That would be fine."

There was a pause. "Would eleven o'clock be all right?"

"Perfect," I said.

I had been given five thousand dollars working capital by the police, and I invested some of it in a decent hotel room not far from Dr. Selwyn Zern's Fifth Avenue address. I spent a quiet night there, and in the morning,

walked to the canopied entrance.

The waiting room was thickly-carpeted and reverently quiet. The nurse with the chirping voice turned out to be a finely constructed blonde with an upturned nose and a flashing smile. She didn't react to the sight of Arego's face.

At eleven-ten, she said:

"Dr. Zern will see you now."

She led me into the inner office. Dr. Zern was sitting behind a leather-topped desk, scrawling notes on a memo pad. He was a stoutish man with a merry expression, a little like a smooth-shaven Father Christmas. He spoke to me without looking up.

"Take a seat," he said cheerfully.

I sat down and waited nervously until his eyes met mine. When they did, the joviality left his face and was replaced by a mingled expression of shock and disbelief. The mood lasted for only a fleeting moment. He smiled again, and said:

"Now, then, Mr. Duncan. Just what's your problem?"

"I—I'm not sure, Dr. Zern. Lately, I've been subject to strange fits of depression. I've been having odd dreams,

and thinking crazy thoughts. I thought it would be smart to seek medical advice."

"That was very wise of you. Too many people wait until they no longer want help. Now suppose we get some basic information—"

He pulled up a printed form, but I stopped him.

"Wait a minute, Dr. Zern. Before you write anything, I want to know if you think I need treatment. Suppose I describe one of my dreams for you?"

He frowned. "I don't understand."

"Perhaps you will, if you hear it. Last night, I dreamed that I was walking in outer space, surrounded by stars and flashing meteors. There was a spaceship visible in the distance, a great green vessel, but it wasn't really interested in my plight. I called out to it for help, but of course my voice wasn't heard in the stillness of the void. I was alone, terrifyingly alone. But then I looked below me, and saw a soft glowing object. It looked warm and friendly and inviting. Once I had been afraid of it; once I had thought it cold and airless and alien, but now I knew it was Home."

"And what was this object?" Zern said. I could hear

the accelerated sound of his breathing.

"It was the Moon," I said.
"And it was mine."

He put down the pencil and stared at me.

I said: "Does that dream mean anything to you, Dr. Zern? If it doesn't, I think we're wasting time."

"Who are you?" His voice was a whisper.

"A ghost from Aristarchus," I smiled. "But a very solid ghost, Doctor."

"Arego," Zern muttered, as if it were a prayer.

"Arego," I said.

Moffet had been right. Once Dr. Zern became convinced of my identity, my greeting was that of a returned Savior. But he didn't convince easily. He fired question after question at me, probing for signs of faltering, seeking any chinks in the armor of facts which had been constructed for my defense. I came through the test with flying colors.

"I've been a long time getting back," I said. "I had to give them time to forget me, time to forget our Cause. But now I'm here, and now I'm ready to help. I've heard that there are plans, Doctor."

"There are plans," he said violently. "Good plans. This

time, we won't make the same mistakes. This time, we're going to be ready before we strike."

"And when will that be?"

"The date hasn't been set. There's been too much disagreement among the members of the Central Committee. But maybe now—"

"But how, Doctor? How will it begin?"

He smiled. "In the only manner left to us, Arego. We shall begin not on the Moon—but on Earth."

"Earth?"

"The occupation force on the Moon has become slothful and careless, but they still stand in the way of preparation. So we are beginning right here, readying our weapons in the camp of the enemy."

"What weapons?"

"Moon-to-Earth missiles, with atomic warheads. The weapon we should have prepared before the Revolt. The only weapon that will give us the iron fist we need to make our voices heard."

I took a deep breath.

"But how is that possible? Where would you get such weapons?"

"We are building them ourselves. Our own scientists and engineers are readying them. By the time we are

ready to declare the Moon a sovereign power, they'll be pointed at the continents of Earth. We will never fire them if our demands are met. If not, we will make sure that the Earth never forgets the price of tyranny."

"But how can you build them? Where?"

"I'll show you," Dr. Zern smiled. "I'll show you tonight."

At nine that night, I met Dr. Selwyn Zern at the Manhattan Heliport. An attendant had readied his 'copter for what seemed to be a routine flight. From the way he looked at me, I knew the attendant must have thought I was a patient being transported by Zern to the mental home in Georgia.

We arrived a little before two in the morning, the helicopter alighting on the thick lawn behind the sprawling building that was the Pickering Clinic.

From the moment we entered, the ceaseless pulse of activity was evident throughout the building.

"That's strange," I said. "So much noise—in a hospital."

He laughed. "Surely you've guessed, Areo. This is a very unusual hospital. It's populat-

ed by a very unusual brand of —lunatics."

"Lunatics," I repeated.

"The idea came to us almost five years ago. What could be a better hiding place for our activities than a mental home? It's a place where concealment is understood and tolerated. It provokes curiosity, but also repellence. If anything strange seems to be going on, the world considers it the strangeness of the insane. So we built the Pickering Clinic, and filled its rooms and wards only with patients marked by that special sort of madness we wanted. That madness that makes rebels."

"Brilliant," I said.

"But that was only part of the strategy. The most important part was this. Like an iceberg, the mightiness of the Pickering Clinic is three-quarters below the surface."

We entered an elevator, and the doctor pressed a button.

We began to descend.

Then I knew where the noise was coming from.

The basement of the Pickering Clinic was not a basement at all.

It was a missile factory.

I stared at the sight, gaping at the incredible assembly line in this incongruous

setting, watching the movements of dozens of white-coated workers and engineers and scientists moving about the factory floor.

Zern chuckled. "You can inspect the facilities later, Arego. Now we have something important to do. I've alerted all the members of the Central Committee, and they've assembled in the main conference room to meet you. I don't have to tell you that this is a great moment for all of us."

I followed him back to the elevator, trying to tear my eyes from the sleek white cylinders that would be carrying the threat of death and destruction to Earth.

We went to the fourth floor of the clinic, and walked down a polished corridor to the swinging doors at the end of the hall.

Zern pushed them open.

Around the conference table, there were twelve pairs of expectant eyes.

"Arego," someone whispered.

The faces were a blur to me at first. I looked them over, seeking to recall the descriptions which Moffet had given me. My gaze halted at the end of the table when I saw the woman.

She stood up.

"He's an imposter," she said coldly.

I stared at Mrs. Sorenson.

"He's not Arego," she said.
"He's not my son."

The hubbub that followed her announcement amounted almost to pandemonium. Zern managed to silence them only by raising his hands and shouting at the assemblage.

"Wait! Wait! You have to give him a chance—"

"You think I wouldn't know my own son?" Mrs. Sorenson's voice cut through the din. "This man is not Arego. We're being duped. It's a police trick—"

Zern's face was moist. He stood in front of me, as if to protect me from their anger. When he managed to bring them back to silence, he said:

"You must give him a chance. I've talked to him. I've asked him questions that no one but Arego himself could answer. You must remember—it's been years since you've seen him—"

Now Mrs. Sorenson came around the table to stand beside me. I knew that I could no longer brazen out the deception. There had been nothing in Arego's fact-file about Arego's mother.

She touched my arm.

"Sing it," she said. "Sing

the song we used to sing together. Then I'll believe you."

I swallowed hard. "I can't remember it. It's so long ago . . ."

They were watching me.

"You wouldn't have forgotten. Arego wouldn't have forgotten."

I knew the deception was over. It was the time for action, even desperate action.

I grabbed the old woman's arm and whirled her in front of me. With my other hand, I pushed Dr. Zern aside, and dove into my belt for the small revolver I had been carrying since leaving the Code Police. The assemblage gasped as I slammed the gun's muzzle against Mrs. Sorenson's back.

"Keep away," I said threateningly. "I won't hesitate to use this."

"Let him!" the woman said, struggling in my arms. "What does it matter?"

They were on their feet, shouting at me. I backed out towards the swinging doors of the conference room, dragging my hostage with me.

"Don't let him get away!" Mrs. Sorenson shrieked. "Let him kill me! He'll tell them everything—he'll spoil it all—"

But they weren't listening

to her. They were frozen, immobilized.

"You're sentimental fools!" she raged. "Fools!"

I caught one glimpse of Zern's face before I made the elevator. It was tear-stained and quivering, and I knew that their affection for Arego's mother was even stronger than their sense of danger. But I couldn't wait until that sense overcame their sentimentality! I slammed the button that took the elevator to the ground floor of the building. Mrs. Sorenson scratched and kicked at me to the point where I could do nothing else. I lifted the small revolver and brought it down on her gray head. She went limp in my arms. She was no more trouble.

I dragged her unconscious body across the lawn towards the waiting helicopter. Then I placed it carefully on the grass, and ran for the craft. I was grateful when I heard her moan of returning consciousness, and even more grateful when I heard the whine of the engine starting beneath the floorboards of the 'copter.

From the windows of the Pickering Clinic, a shaky rifleman tried to stop my flight to freedom. The bullets sang around the plastic dome

of the fuselage, but did no damage. I was safe. . . . Mission completed.

I left the 'copter at the heliport in New York, and then headed for the hotel. Moffet would be surprised to learn how rapidly his mission had been accomplished, but I wanted him to come to me for the news.

I telephoned Code headquarters. He arrived in less than half an hour.

I kept him waiting while I changed clothes and took a shower, and shaved the strange face that looked back at me in the bathroom mirror.

When I came out, Moffet's saintly face was flushed with impatience.

"I've found your rebels," I told him. "And I know their plans."

He smiled triumphantly, and I recounted the events of the last hours.

"Incredible!" he said, when I was through. "Under our very noses—"

"They're clever all right. But not clever enough. I think Zern was so anxious to believe that Arego had returned that he forgot to be cautious."

"You've done a great job, Kane," Moffet said. "We owe you a lot."

"You don't owe me anything. Just freedom."

He smiled. "What a pity. And that's about the only reward I can't promise you."

"What?"

He drew a service pistol from his coat.

"I wish things could be different, Kane. You've accomplished something that we couldn't do alone. You've saved a lot of lives. But that doesn't blind me to the fact that you're a criminal, Kane. A dangerous criminal, and one that can't be turned loose on society."

His eyes were glowing hotly, with the fervor of the fanatic. I couldn't believe that he had betrayed me. I stared at him, shaking my head.

"I know what you're thinking," Moffet said. "You're thinking that my tactics are execrable. You're right, of course. I'm not proud of them. But you must know me by now, Kane. I'm willing to use any means to end the careers of vermin like you. You might call it a higher duty—"

I saw a flash of red in front of my eyes, and I started to throw myself at Moffet's throat. He backed off and waved the gun in my face.

"Be careful. I'm a cop,

Kane, not an executioner. But I'm willing to be both."

I cursed at him viciously, but Moffet only chuckled.

"You can't hurt me with words, Kane. I knew what I was duty-bound to do from the first." Then he snarled, and the saintliness disappeared from his features. "What makes you think you've got a right to honorable treatment? You're a wild beast, Kane. You're a jungle animal. Since when do jungle animals have a code of ethics?"

"I'll kill you for this!" My voice was shaking.

"In six hours, you'll be heading for the prison asteroid, Kane. You can plan my death there, and I wish you luck."

"You won't deliver me," I said. "You'll have to send my body, Moffet. That's the only way I'll go."

I started for him. He backed off uncertainly, and then saw that I meant my words. He'd have to kill me before he could call me prisoner.

He raised the gun.

I dropped to the carpet and the first bullet smashed overhead, splintering the wall behind me. The next bullet hit me somewhere in my leg as I dove for him. I stumbled and fell, and waited for the final shot.

I heard it, but nothing happened.

A moment later, I raised my head. As if through a gathering fog, I saw Moffet's white hair resting against the floor, the temples staining rapidly with blood.

Then someone touched me. The hand was cool on my cheek.

"Fern," I said.

"No. Not Fern. I'm Dorothea."

"You killed him. You killed Moffet . . ."

"To save you. And to save . . . us."

I tried to focus my eyes on her face.

"You're one of *them*. The Moon rebels."

"Mrs. Sorenson told me what happened. I found out you had returned here. I've been listening at the door; I heard everything—the plan, the agreement."

"Then why didn't you kill me? I know as much as Moffet does. I found out—"

"They didn't know you were Toby Kane. Mrs. Sorenson and the others. That's why she accused you."

"I don't understand."

She lifted my head. For a moment, my eyes cleared.

"Listen," she said carefully. "Listen hard. I was the

one who got Sam Thumbs to send for you. It was the only way we knew to get your interest, to offer you a target for your confidence schemes. Because we knew you weren't a criminal, not at heart. We knew you were only a sick, tortured man, without any true knowledge of what you were or what you might become . . ."

"I thought you were working for Moffet," I said. "When you drugged me . . ."

"I was working for *us*," Fern said. "I drugged you because we planned to kidnap you, to take you to Pickering Clinic, where we hoped to restore your memory, to help you recall—"

"My . . . memory?"

"Yes. Your memory—the memory that was destroyed the night we died in the crater Aristarchus. The night we planned the deception that would permit us to fight another day." There were tears on her cheeks. "Most of the rest escaped. But you were brought down by a fire-bullet. You were wearing an Earth uniform, so that you were mistaken for one of *them*, and taken to a hospital on Earth. We didn't know about it, then. We thought you had been killed. But after the war, we found records. Rec-

ords that made us believe that you were alive, Arego, truly alive . . ."

I struggled to sit up, fighting the pain in my leg.

"What are you saying? Are you telling me that I'm—no, that's impossible."

"You're Arego!" she said fiercely. "The face you wear is your *own* face. What an ironic joke on Captain Moffet!"

"But Mrs. Sorenson—"

"Your mother. She *did* believe you were an imposter, because she knew that her son was wearing the face of Toby Kane. She never expected to find Arego with his own features—" She laughed wildly, but the tears were still coming.

"I can't believe it!" I said. "I don't remember anything before the hospital—"

"Try, Arego, try!" She buried her head on my chest and sobbed freely. "You must remember! We need you. *I* need you!"

I touched her hair.

"Dorothea," I whispered.

"Your wife," she said, almost inaudibly.

I returned with Dorothea to Pickering Clinic. It took them four months of shock therapy to restore the past to my mind.

But now it's over, and now

I know my past—and my future.

In four days, the first rocket ship leaves Georgia on a seemingly innocent voyage to the Moon, carrying supplies for the colonists.

The occupation forces have grown careless. They will never detect the presence of the missile parts which have

been scattered throughout the shipment.

In another month, my wife and I will travel to the Moon ourselves. We watch the glowing silver orb nightly from our window, and speak softly in the darkness of our destiny.

We are the children of the Moon, and the Moon is ours.

THE END



"Now it's 1924 . . . you're three years old."

If you knew for sure the world would end at 5:30 tomorrow, would there be one heart's desire you'd want to achieve beforehand? This is the story of a secret yearning, of—

One Man's Ambition

By BERTRAM CHANDLER

THE room was quiet, save for the murmur of light music from the radio. The room was quiet with that quietness possible only when there are two people together. It was not the stillness of affectionate companionship, however; it was the deceptive serenity that should have as its background music the ticking of the time fuse, the sputtering of the slow match.

They were reading—she sitting in her armchair, he in his. He put his book down on his lap, filled and lit his pipe. She coughed as the cloud of acrid smoke reached her.

"Must you," she demanded, "smoke that foul thing?"

"I like it," he said.

"Other men," she com-

plained, "smoke good tobacco."

"I smoke what I can afford," he told her.

"Cheapness!" she flared. "Cheapness! Cheapness! Ever since I was fool enough to marry you there's been nothing but cheapness! A cheap flat in a cheap town. Cheap food. Cheap drinks. Cheap clothes. A cheap car . . ."

"We cut our coat according to our cloth."

"Oh, if the cheapness were confined to material things I shouldn't mind so much. But you're such a cheap person in all ways. Your taste in films is cheap, your taste in music. And as for your taste in books . . ."

"That's not cheap," he said sullenly.

"Oh, isn't it? Cheap and

adolescent, I'd say. Let me see." She got up from her chair, snatched the book from his lap. She read, scornfully, "*Rocket To Tomorrow*. And you say that's not cheap!"

"It's not. It's a very good anthology."

"Cheap escapism."

"It's not escapism. How many times must I tell you that good science fiction is not escapist—a thing that could never be said about the historical novels that you're so fond of."

"Not escapist, you say? Rockets to the moon, little green men from Mars, flying saucers . . ."

"Good science fiction," he said, "deals with problems that men and women will have to face someday. Someday soon, perhaps."

"All right," she said. "I'll take you up on that. You seem to be halfway through a story called *Judgment Eve*. What's it about?"

"You should read it," he said. "It's rather good."

"Read that trash! You tell me what it's about, that's all I want to know."

"All right. The author assumes that the sun is about to become a Nova—which means, of course, that Earth and all its inhabitants will be

incinerated. The people have been told what is going to happen. The story tells how various men and women spend their last hours of life."

"Very helpful," she sneered. "I suppose that after reading it you'll be well equipped to face such an emergency. Now, just tell me what *you* would do if you learned that the world was going to come to an end tomorrow."

He refilled his pipe. Over the little flame of the match he glared at his wife.

"Let me have my book back," he said.

"Oh, no. Not until you've answered my question. What would *you* do?"

"It all depends . . ." he muttered.

"It all depends on *what*? A typical, evasive answer. It all depends, I suppose, on whether or not you had the skill and the knowledge to build a spaceship to escape to Mars or Jupiter or wherever it is that people *do* escape to in these silly stories. (And did you have the nerve to say that they weren't escapist?) Come on, answer me."

"Given enough time," he said, "a ship could be built."

"But not by *you*."

"No."

"Then what would *you* do?"

"Give it a rest, will you?" he snarled.

"Why should I? You've often said that we have no conversation these days, and now that I've gone out of my way to cater to your juvenile interests you dry up."

"It's impossible to talk about anything," he said, "so long as you insist on making everything so damned personal. If we can't discuss a thing objectively we can't discuss it at all."

"And why not?"

"Because you make everything so damned personal. The next thing will be that you'll be telling me that at least three of the marvelous men you knew in the past could have built spaceships out of two oil drums and a kerosene heater and whisked you off to the Asteroid Belt with hours to spare."

"Perhaps they could, at that. But you haven't answered my question. What would *you* do?"

"I don't know."

He got up from his chair.

"Where are you going?"

"Into the kitchen to pour myself a beer. Do you mind?"

"You might ask me if *I* want one."

"Do you?"

"No."

He walked through into the kitchen. He got a glass out of the cupboard. He opened the refrigerator, took out a bottle of beer. He had the opener poised over the cap when he was startled by a loud, brief crackle from the radio.

"You might look at the set," called his wife. "It seems to have gone wrong."

"It can wait," he replied.

Then, instead of the music, there was a voice—frightened, speaking hastily, fading for seconds at a time.

"Emergency transmitter . . . intercontinental missiles . . . hydrogen . . . New York has been . . . London . . . Washington destroyed . . . Moscow . . . it is believed that . . . cobalt . . ."

"Did you hear?" she cried. "What does it mean?"

"It means," he said, putting down the bottle and going to a drawer, "the end of the world."

"What shall we do?"

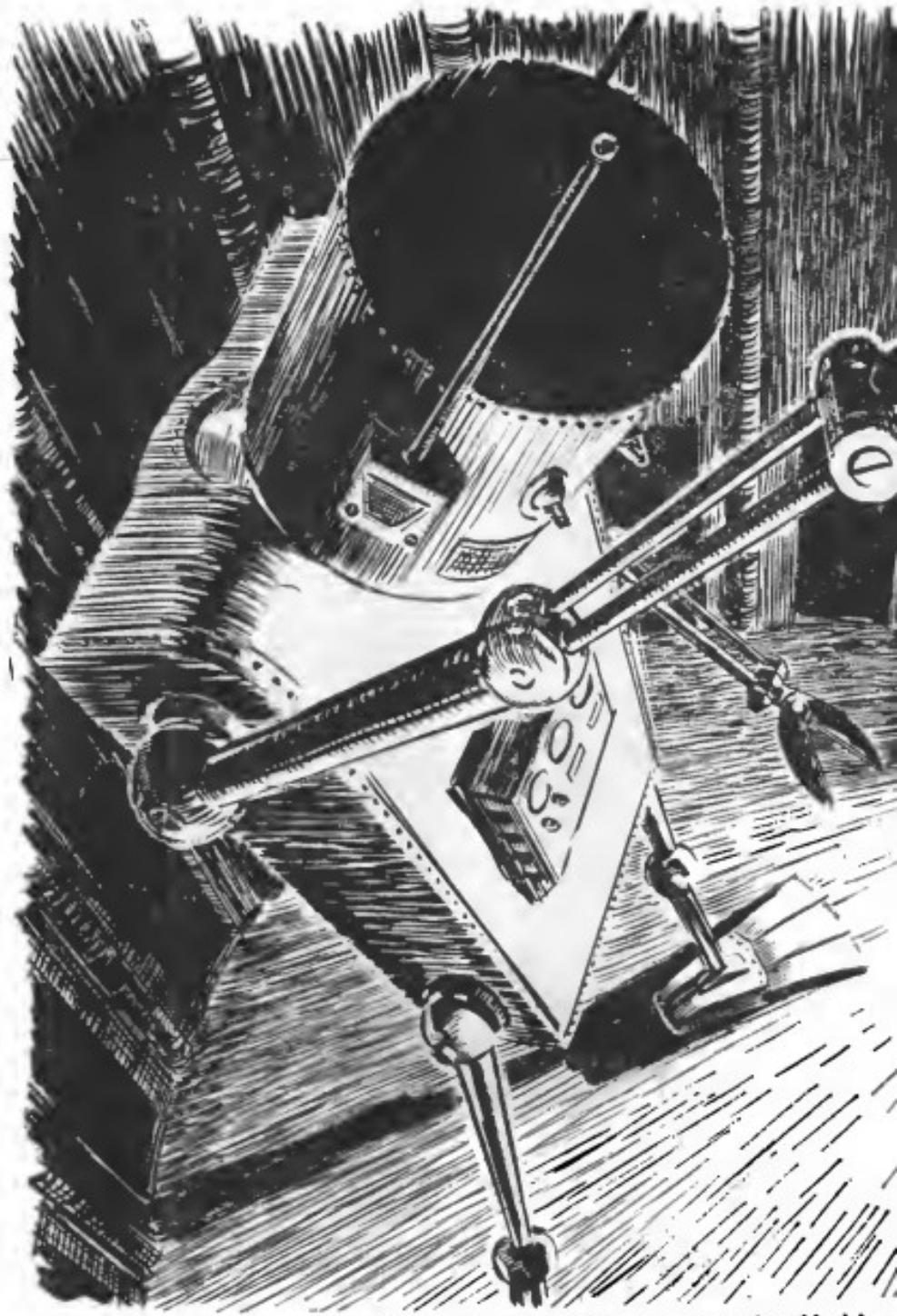
He opened the drawer.

"What shall we do?" she called again.

He walked through into the living room, the carving knife gleaming in his hand.

"Reverting to your original question, my dear," he said, "here is the answer."

THE END



The vast robot lifted the screaming Vedria



It began with a beautiful girl being jet-dragged through space, a common practice on Sygor. There was also a tyrant — a mental giant who could think men into suicide, and a robot the like of which mortal man had never seen. All of which added up to a terrible climax—

THE VENGEANCE OF GALAXY 5

By HARLAN ELLISON

TWO things made me want to hang around the planet Sygor out in Galaxy 5.

The first was their refusal to give me landing coordinates.

They had thrown a force Barrier up around the planet. It kicked the *Pitchman* back half a mile, when I tried to crash-open it. Then that insulting voice from Sygor control-center split through my intercom. "Go away! There is no landing allowed! We want no strangers here!"

Strangers? That was good! I'd been coming to Sygor once every two and a half years for

the past fifteen. It was the eighth planet on my trading route. I'd always been able to bring in luxury items—Caputian snake-rings, Armani snuff and spices, living puppets from JawkThor and five-coppers from Heos II—and carry away spools of glass-thread.

It had never been an especially profitable stopover—not as profitable, say, as the stopover on Blassingworth, where they swapped goblets carved from rubies and diamonds for jazz records by Bix and Brubeck, Satch and Django—but it was a pleasant sort of world, and it was a break in the light-year run from Caputia. And never let it be said that Loper Martin passed up a buck.

"What do you mean *stranger*?" I yelled into the combox.

"No co-ordinates will be given you . . . the Barrier will not be opened. Go away or we will fire on you!"

That was the first reason I wanted to hang around Sygor. It had always been a friendly planet, and now suddenly it had become not only closed-off, but definitely hostile. There was something wrong down there.

And I don't like being pushed.

The second reason came speeding up from the planet ten minutes later, as I circled Sygor's blue and orange bulk. I wasn't going away that easily, and reconnaissance seemed like a good idea. It just happened I was there at that moment; it was straight chance—completely unpredictable. I was passing over the Desert of the Sun, all glowing with iridescent orange sand, when the sport-jet shot into the sky.

I watched it for a second, the little blue-steel body and swept-back wings, till I realized the pilot was towing something. Even then it didn't interest me a lot till I saw he was towing—a girl!

She was stripped down to pants and bra, and they'd spot-welded chains to her upper arms. She was being jet-dragged out to the edge of the Barrier, and in another minute I knew what would happen. It was the usual way—out this end of the galaxy—to get rid of someone you didn't like.

Jet-drag 'em till their breath was blocked off, they were half-conscious from the jetstream and the loss of oxygen, and then "crack-the-whip" with them! It was a vicious form of murder, and the end result was the victim

speeding out like a rocket into dead space. If they didn't have a broken neck by then, they'd suffocate.

And the girl was too well-built to finish that way.

I tossed the *Pitchman* into primary drive and slipped down toward the Barrier. Fast.

The little jet was coming up in a blue streak, and I knew if he was going to crack-the-whip with her—they'd have to let down the Barrier to do it. This might be a double benefit.

If I could save the girl, and get inside the Barrier, I might be able to satisfy myself about what was boiling on Sygor.

But I'd have to be good in this. A sort of cosmic basketball game, with the doll as the ball! I banked over him, vectoring across the sport-jet's path. He hadn't seen me yet, and I knew he wasn't coming out into space, because there wasn't any cowl on the jet's cockpit.

I arced over him and whipped in front just as my potentiometer blinked red that the Barrier was down. At that instant the jet pilot threw the little ship into reverse, killing its speed instantly, and letting the chain between girl and ship whip her forward. He

must have cut the connecting link on the jet as he stopped—because the girl slammed past and roared through into space.

I came at them then, with full drive, because a human being can exist in space something like seventy seconds and I didn't want to press the girl's luck. The jet grew big in my viewplate, and I saw the pilot's face as clearly as I cared to see it.

A paunchy, washed-out face with high arched eyebrows and ebony eyes. A slash mouth and an expression of hatred. His mouth opened as I sped toward the girl. He mouthed something as the girl and chain sped toward me.

And when I opened up the scoop, and the dame clanged inside, he screamed. It was all so clear in the viewplate . . . we were that close!

The scoop hole was padded—for snaking in damageable goods from freighters in space—so I knew she was all right. But I had to open the sphincter-valve between decks, so she could get up where the air was breathable.

I gave a mock, phony salute to the slob in the sport-jet and jiggled over his head, making for the planet below.

Another few minutes and

he wasn't even a speck in the evening sky. He was gone.

The girl didn't get much farther than the storage hold. She collapsed, and that's where I found her. She was half-tumbled over a crate of some breakfast cereal I was hauling to Fond-Dag-Lac, and the chain was so heavy it had pulled the metal circlets tight. She was bleeding from both arms and unconscious.

She was a honey blonde, the kind most people call a "raving beauty." But there was more to her than the hair, which isn't the case with most honey blondes. Her features were regular and small, just right for her heart-shaped face. But there was a regalness, a *queenly* something about her, that would have marked her in a harem full of honey blondes.

Her body was slight, but full, and I found it amazing that she had stood up under the punishment of being jet-dragged. It showed stamina of a rare sort.

I was attracted . . . but *attracted!*

"You could probably observe me better if I were lying down somewhere," she said, and I realized she'd come to consciousness, caught me staring.

"Oh . . . er . . . sorry," I bumbled, stooping to lift her.

She brushed my hand away, and stumbled to her feet unaided. This girl had a corner on the guts market. "Where's the lounge?" she asked.

"No lounge," I spread my hands in sorrow. "All I've got is a contourcouch if you want to lie down."

"How remarkable that you should think I'd want to lie down . . ." she started, and then fell into my arms, dead again.

I hoisted and carried her updecks, laid her out on the couch. She was tossing and mumbling in her coma, and I seemed to catch the words *Aslik*, and *Felara* and a whole sentence of jumbled phrases. She repeated them over and over; mostly the names.

The name *Felara* I recognized. It was the name of the Prince of Sygor. Felara was the fifteen-year-old son of King Lormell, who ruled the planet with his Electorate Congress. Why this girl should be mumbling his name was something I didn't understand. But I was going to find out.

I went into the workshop and brought back an electro-saw, to scorch off those arm bracelets. She wakened as I was needling a thin line

through the second one. She watched me in silence, her brown eyes masked by wariness.

"He didn't seem to like you," I ventured.

She gave a grunting half-laugh, and rubbed her arms where the bracelets had bitten deeply. "He doesn't much like anybody," she answered. "He's hired not to like people." It wasn't much of a conversation, and she didn't look like she was going to make it any better—unless I prodded her.

I plunked into the control chair and swiveled around, staring at her openly. "Look, miss, I haven't the faintest idea who you are, or why that joker was trying to ruin your complexion—but something's going on down there, and it's wrecking my schedule, so I'd like to know what it is . . . if you know."

She continued to watch me, and then she began to laugh. It was a high, hysterical laugh, and in a minute I reached across to slap her, but she waved a hand at me, easing me off.

"Don't be gallant," she gasped as the laughter subsided. "I'm not hysterical. It's just funny to hear you mouthing those melodramatic lines

while a whole galaxy is being knuckled-under."

I'm afraid I stared open-mouthed.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"I'm not sure I should tell you," she said, suddenly serious. "It's been a long time since I was able to trust even people I've known all my life. And you don't even come close in that category."

I let my hands flap in frustration. "Look, I don't know what you're afraid of, but I haven't been around for almost three years—now if you want to talk, talk. If you don't, I'll set you down someplace and I'll find out for myself."

I jerked a hand at the viewport, and saw the Skytooth Mountain chain falling below us. I wanted to set the *Pitchman* down fairly quickly, anyhow. That joker in the sport-jet would come looking for us—probably with friends.

An expression of doubt came across the girl's face, and she pursed her beautiful lips for a second. "I'm stuck. I've got to trust somebody. It may as well be you."

I leaned forward to catch her next words, but she motioned me to man the drive. "We've got to get out of sight. You say you've been here before?" I nodded, and she said,

"Do you know where the Rainbow Forest is?" I nodded again, and she followed up with, "Then take this ship there, and I'll show you where to set down. We can camouflage it for a while, and I'll try to explain how Sygor was overrun."

My eyes must have opened wider, because a bitter little smile flicked on and off her lips. "Yes, that's right," she repeated very, very quietly, "I said overrun.

"Sygor has been in enemy hands for over two years."

I started to ask her a million questions—chief among which was: *what enemy?* But she shut me up with a sharp wave of her hand, that somehow backed me off, and I toolled the *Pitchman* away, following the directions she gave for staying beneath sono-tracking range, toward the Rainbow Forest.

It took something like half an hour to cross the main continent. We had to thread down through a canyon pass in the five-mile high pile of mountain, so I eased the ship into secondary, and crept down between the towering walls.

Just as we were trailing through the quarter mile-wide canyon that led to the Rainbow Forest, we were

spotted by a pair of night-black swoop-fighters.

"Aslik's guard!" the girl moaned, as they swam onto the viewplate.

I didn't have time to ask her who Aslik was, or what their intentions were, but they demonstrated the latter immediately.

The leading ship dodged, ducked, did a half-roll and came down on us—trapped between the walls of the orange-rock canyon — blasting as he came.

The first threads of his beam washed across the roof of the cab, but he was still too far away for them to have real intensity; they merely blistered the plasteel a bit. I rolled and tried doubling back up, out of the box-in. But it was no use. The second ship, black as a *tezenee's* eyes, had the end of the canyon behind us blocked off, was coming in dead on-target, with us lined up in his robotsights.

I let the *Pitchman* slide off to the side, hoping to send the swoop-fighters into the canyon wall, but they were experienced men and they knew their business. I was too big to maneuver easily in there; my twenty-thread blasters were useless; they knew it!

The first ship had doubled back and was coming in

eleven o'clock high, and ready for a full-run spray with those deadly ten-threads.

We were boxed in, with swoopers coming in, front and back, like a wild animal trapped in the brush; beaters all about, and no chance to maneuver.

I saw them getting bigger and bigger on the viewplate, and next to me I could hear the girl drawing in her breath raggedly. I tossed her a snap glance and she was sitting there tightly, her face screwed down into one of inexpressible pain, her beautiful face knitted weirdly, her eyes screwed shut, her fists clenched and the thumbs making idle circling movements. I could see every nerve of her straining, tensing—why?

The swoop-fighters leveled, and there was an exultant something about the way they wing-waggled as they bore down on us.

My life didn't flash in front of my eyes, but I knew I was dead . . .

Then they exploded.

They each coughed, bucketed, and shattered. Parts and flesh spewed out across the canyon, and the roar sent the *Pitchman* skewing almost into the walls. I dragged the controls to steady, and set them auto. Then I hyped up

the magnification on the viewers, and watched the puffs of radioactive smoke—like dirty soap-suds—that floated in the cross-winds of the canyon. The swoopers had gone up like kindling—and there was only one thing that could do it:

They had—of their own accord—flooded their drive chambers. They had, in effect, dumped their drive-rods into the critical pile stuff, and blown themselves up.

Which was impossible! No one commits suicide like that.

"They—they killed themselves . . ." I mumbled, unable to accept what had happened.

The girl gasped, and I looked at her. Her face was beginning to loosen, her tension was ebbing away. As though she had just moved a mountain with her mind, she went slack, and began breathing deeply, gasping for air.

"Felara," she breathed. "Felara. I knew he'd help us!"

That name again. The Prince of Sygor. This thing was becoming more and more fantastic by the second.

"Felara?" I inquired. "You mean *he* had something to do with those pilots dumping their drive-rods?"

"He must have activated the Machine."

Which meant nothing to me. "Are you going to tell me what the hell is going on here?" I was plenty mad—just by being completely befuddled! I was almost yelling.

"The Rainbow Forest first," she answered, closing her eyes, leaning back on the contourcouch and assuming a position of sleep.

I could do nothing but follow her instructions.

Sygor had changed an awful lot since I was here last, and somehow, this girl seemed the key to the mystery.

I flipped into secondary again, and made for the Rainbow Forest. Behind us—powdered and fused—the wreckage of the swoopers was still settling into the mile-deep canyon.

We were settled under the sheltering many-colors of the feathertopped trees. The Rainbow Forest stretched off, azure and green and pink and black and orange, in all directions. Underneath the huge fluffy umbrella of the treetops, the *Pitchman* was effectively concealed, and I swiveled in my chair, hands on knees, to stare at this strange girl.

"All right now," I said, "I want the whole story. If you want my help, I want the whole story."

She still had her eyes shut, but a mild derisive laugh bubbled out and across her lips.

Her face became more interesting, the longer I stared into it. Her features had character. She was not the vapid idyllic beauty of so many idealizations; her nose was a bit too small, and her lips a bit too full. But her chin was a defiant one, and her face showed lines of life. This girl was not a dye-stamped product of some wasteful culture. She had thoughts — and thoughts of consequence.

"Even if I told you the story, do you think you could help me—where an entire galaxy has failed?"

I didn't quite know what to answer. I had to try a platitude, and hope it would serve the purpose. "Look, Miss, if this thing is as big and as horrible as you've led me to believe, then perhaps an outsider can break the problem by looking at it on a smaller scale. You may just be too close to it. An objective view might be of value."

Her eyes opened quickly, and I saw her scrutinizing me with intricate care.

"You may be right," she said with terrible slowness.

"All right, then. I'd like the

story, and I'd first like to know who you are."

She sat up, and suddenly realized she was half-naked. Yet her face remained impassive; she didn't blush, and she made no adolescent movements to cover herself. She was a woman, and proud of the fact.

"I am Vedria, Princess of Sygor, sister to Felara."

She said it the way she would have said it were she receiving in the alabaster hall of the Palace. I didn't doubt it for an instant, of course. Even if I'd wanted to, that regal face would have convinced me. And it all added up when I stopped to think of it.

"Then why hasn't your father, King Lormell, solved this problem? From what I've heard of him he's a pretty hard-headed old . . ."

She cut me off, waving her slim hand in annoyance, as though wiping everything I had said from the blackboard of meaning. "My father is dead. Felara is King."

"Dead? How dead?"

"How? By Aslik's hand, and the hand held a triple-thread. He was murdered on his balcony, addressing the people—telling them," and she seemed on the verge of a scream, "*not to resist the invaders any longer.*"

This whole thing was beginning to shape up. But oddly-shaped, because I still didn't have any idea who Aslik was, or where the invaders had come from, or any one of a million other questions.

I asked her to tell it from the start.

"Are you familiar with the Spinxa Cluster?" she asked.

"I don't hit it on my trading route, no," I shook my head, "but I'm familiar with the territory by reputation. Why?"

"Two years ago a petty emperor named Aslik rose up from somewhere in the Spinxa Cluster, and began overrunning every world in sight. He's conquered the entire far end of Galaxy 5—in two years."

It was the most fantastic thing I'd ever heard—and also the most illogical.

"But why?" I demanded, incredulously, "it's been statistically proven there's no margin of profit in space-conquest!"

She shrugged her pretty shoulders eloquently. "He says 'territorial expansion' but I say just the lust for power. The man's mad, and there's no stopping him." She let a different tone slip into her voice, "Oh, of course he conquered a great many of those

planets by the sheer laziness or inadequacy of the residents—there's never been any war out here—but there's been a great deal of fighting. Actual, out-in-the-open combat, and the waves of terror are spreading all through the center of the Galaxy."

Had I been standing, I would have sat down with a plop. But I wasn't, so all I could do was rake my hand through my mop of red hair. "This is unbelievable!" I murmured.

"Unbelievable or not," she replied, "it's so. And that's it. They came rumbling out of space, and one day they were here. The ruins on the other side of the planet, near Capitol City, would convince you. Almost one-fifth of our population was killed in the first two weeks of fighting."

I computed quickly.

"Why did the battle for Sygor take so long? Why hasn't Aslik moved on?"

Her face deepened its expression. "The Machine," she said.

"Machine? What Machine?" I had to use the capital . . . she had, with great meaning.

"It's a robot," she said, then stopped abruptly. "Just a weapon, that's all. No more of that now. If you want to help,

all you can do is help me get back to Capitol City. There's nothing more you can do."

I wouldn't let it rest there. "Vedria, my name is Martin. Loper Martin. I'm a trader, pure and simple. I've been ranging this section of the galaxy since I was twelve years old—with my old man. I've got no interests in this thing other than finding out what can be done about Aslik and stopping him.

"I'm a trader, with no particular planetary obligations, and the only reason I'm on your side is that they've cut me off from a good market."

"No other reasons?" she asked sardonically.

"Well . . . that and the fact it bothers me to see as nice a race as you Sygorites being shoved around."

She watched me carefully, and I had to fight from smiling. It's so damned hard not to smile when someone's watching your expressions closely.

"I almost believe you, Martin."

"Then if you do, tell me the rest of this. You're obviously holding a lot back."

"I said I *almost* trust you."

"Dammit woman, you've got no other choice!"

Her face suddenly dropped all expressions of mock brav-

ery and I saw naked fear course in her eyes. "You're right. I've got to trust someone. It may as well be you."

"Then tell me."

"All right," she said resignedly. "When Aslik's fleet came down, they started using their big twenty- and forty-thread beams on the cities.

"So father—that was King Lormell—went down to the vaults beneath the Palace where the remains of the Elder Race's scientific apparatus had been stored when discovered, and activated the Machine."

"What's this about the Elder Race? I've never heard anything about—"

"They were using Sygor as a base of some kind, eons ago, and were long gone by the time we were mature enough to even suspect they'd been here. But they left some of their implements behind, and through the years father was able to discover bits of their usage. The Machine was one of those weapons."

"What . . . what does it do?" I asked.

"It's a huge robot, sensitive to thought-patterns. When a certain key-phrase is spoken, it activates the robot, and the Machine then turns a lethal sort of mental ray on any-

one thinking those particular thoughts."

I was stunned. "Are you trying to tell me that if I was thinking one of these *negative* thoughts—that the robot had been trained to recognize as negative—I'd get my brains charred out?"

"That's almost exactly correct. Father had the robot keyed to the conquest and killing thoughts of Aslik and his men. In a matter of a few hours, half of Aslik's fleet had been blown up. The men had committed suicide by order of the robot."

"Then that explains the explosion of those swoopers!" It dawned on me suddenly. "But I thought you said Aslik was still here? Why didn't the robot finish the fleet off?"

"Aslik sent down a truce message, telling father he surrendered. So father deactivated the robot, and went to tell the people not to fight back any more."

"And that's when . . ." "Yes," she cut in bitterly, "that's when Aslik threaded him down. Then his fleet settled, he took over the planet and closed it off."

"But why didn't he move on? Why didn't he fire on me when I showed up?"

"He wants the robot. He

can't go on till he gets it. The Machine is such a perfect weapon, he wants it to conquer the rest of the galaxy. He knows he has to stay put here till he can get it, so he's been warning away any ships that come in from space. Till he can get the Machine. If they don't go away, if they get suspicious, he shoots them down."

There was one thing bothering me. "Well, why doesn't he take the robot and go?"

"He can't get to it," she answered almost desperately. "It's down in the vault-maze; and even if he *did* get it, he couldn't use it because he doesn't know the activating phrase."

It was all painfully clear now.

"Then he can't ever get the robot—because your father died with the secret." I thought that settled the problem on that score.

"No, that isn't so," she answered. I stared, startled.

"Felara knows it," she said simply.

"Father told him what the phrase was, before he died. Then he had it hypno-buried, so my brother could only remember it under great stress or mental connection."

"Mental connection?" I started, the incident of the

swoopers exploding coming back to me sharply. "Are you trying to tell me you and your brother are—"

"That's right," she nodded, "we're two-way telepathic. Sometimes," she added hastily.

"Then you were trying to contact your brother, and he felt the tension, activated the robot telepathically, and the Machine made the pilots dump their drive-rods."

"That's what happened," she agreed. This thing was getting more deadly involved by the second. A royal family of Sygor; royal because they were inbred-telepaths! A family trait!

"Well then why doesn't your brother just activate the Machine and let it finish off Aslik and his men?"

"They've got him prisoner in a Pleasure House, where he won't feel any stress. They're using every subtle trick to get him to divulge the phrase, without activating the Machine. He's under narco-stim almost the entire day, and they're probing, probing, probing continuously."

"They haven't been able to crack him yet," I murmured to myself, astounded at the strength of a fifteen-year-old boy.

"No," she agreed sadly, "they haven't. And that's why I was being dragged."

I looked at her questioningly.

"Aslik had Felara watching on a viewer as they dragged me. He said they'd kill me if Felara didn't co-operate with the narco-stim. He must have agreed, and then they cut the picture, and Aslik gave the command to finish me off with the dragging.

"Right now, Felara may be helping them get to the phrase, thinking he can save my life. If you hadn't come along, I'd have been dead, and there would have been no chance."

I sat back, feeling as though I'd been wrung dry.

There it was. I'd saved the Princess of Sygor; her brother the Prince—no, the King, now!—was in the hands of a ruthless madman from somewhere in space, who was viciously probing the boy's mind for the key to the deadliest weapon I'd ever heard about.

It wasn't a pretty situation, and I was sorry I'd offered to help. It seemed as though Felara, Sygor, and this end of Galaxy 5, were doomed.

And perhaps the rest of the Galaxy, when Aslik got that Machine.

I felt about as useful as kitchen utensils to a no-armed, rock-eating Biiyuk native. I was only Loper Martin, not the Saviour of the Universe. I was only a traveling salesman, not a bulging-biceps warrior!

Vedria's beautiful face was sunk in terror and hopelessness. And as I swiveled around in the control chair, a feeling of hopelessness beating at me, I caught sight of my own face in the burnished panels of the CourseComp. It wasn't *my* world—but we both had the same expression!

I couldn't decide what to do, but I knew one thing: we needed help.

"Vedria," and she turned her face from the wall, to stare at me. A guy could easily forget she was a Princess—she was more woman than ruler.

"Yes?"

"Look, I know you want to get back to Capitol City, and get Felara out of Aslik's hands, but we can't do it alone. We've got to get out of here and come back with help. We're the only ones free, who know Aslik is bogged down on Sygor."

"If we can get out and run the half light-year to Choom-

lik, we can contact the space navy there, and bring back enough heavy stuff to crack that Barrier . . . perhaps catch Aslik's fleet in dry-dock."

There was mute appeal on her face, but she didn't argue. Suddenly her voice was compliant, as though she had worried the situation so long, she was weary of it. "Whatever you say."

I knew I couldn't cheer her, but I tried to break the tension. That half light-year run was no picnic jaunt, and I thought it would be better on both of us if she were more at ease: "You can call me Loper," I chided her.

She didn't answer, just let a tracery of smile flicker and disappear.

"We'll get him out okay, you'll see," I reassured her hollowly, and tossed the *Pitchman* into secondary.

Nothing happened.

The dials didn't stir. The drive-rods didn't slam into place. The roaring didn't begin, and the ship didn't shudder.

Nothing happened.

I examined the dials. It wasn't a bugaboo in the system. The damned dials weren't registering *anything!* Not even amount of fuel or the time on the chrono.

Then it dawned. Nastily, frighteningly, unhappily—but it *did* dawn.

The dials were hooked into the electrical system. They weren't working, the ship wasn't working; ergo, the electrical system was dead. Ergo ditto, the ship was dead.

We were trapped on Sygor.

I gave the story to Vedria quickly, outlining it as best I could. "Whatever kind of Barrier they've slung up there—and there are hundreds of kinds of Barriers, you know—they've jazzed it up somehow, and its blanketed off our power source."

"We're stuck," I said.

"Martin," she began to ask, but I raised a finger, and she remembered, smiling . . .

"I mean, *Loper*; do you really want to help us?"

I could only nod my head. I was more deeply involved now than I'd thought I could be. On Choomlik I could have sat back and said, 'Let the navy handle it, I'm only a salesman,' but Choomlik was far away, Sygor was in trouble, this girl was quite beautiful, and I didn't like my markets being eaten away by a maniac named Aslik.

There were too many good reasons for me to refuse. "Yes, I want to help, Vedria."

She sat up on the contour-couch. "There was a reason I asked you to bring me to the Rainbow Forest," she said.

I arched a copper-colored eyebrow. "There was?"

She nodded. "Do you have any hand-weapons?"

I palm-pressed the panel by the cab door, and a rack of three-, ten- and fifteen-thread disruptors slid out.

"You'd better take a fifteen-thread," she advised, plucking a three-thread hand-pistol for herself, and pointing to the fifteen-thread automatic rifle in its sling-rack.

I took it down, thumbed the magazine open and quickly assayed the five hundred minute—but deadly—charges racked together. I was ready, but I didn't know for what.

"Let's go," she said, and made her way belowdecks. I unlocked the sphincter, and when we came to the outside hull I took a quick look-see through the port. The Forest was dead-silent as far as I could tell. She nodded for me to undog the port.

The Forest was empty, as far as I could see, but it wasn't quiet. Sounds melted into sounds. The weird pulse pulse pulse of bird's songs interposed across the howls of animals. The murmuring of

the feathertop trees. The beat of the branches. The sound of the growing land. The Forest was a live thing, flooded with color, flooded with noise, flooded with life. Empty? Not a bit. The Rainbow Forest was a wilderness of existence. But none of it came to me as danger.

This was the sort of place a wanderer like myself could set down and never leave. Ever-changing, yet familiar from the first.

But I had no time for that . . .

"Why here?" I asked. There seemed to be no logic to our landing here. We were around the other side of the planet—not even on the same continent—and hopelessly unable to bring aid to *anybody*, much less Felara who was being watched by Aslik.

"I'll show you," she said, and we walked into the Forest.

Streamers of azure and green and gold ran off through the trees, and the soft wind bubbled through the massed feathertops. As we walked, the springy gray soil of the Forest sank under our feet. Birds took to flight, slicing away on pinioning wings of many colors.

We walked steadily, follow-

ing a twisting, involved path, for almost an hour. The daylight blocked off above the trees, and the Forest sank into gloom deeper than I'd ever known.

Vedria didn't say a word, and actually, I was grateful for that. I wanted to think—think about a lot of things.

This situation on Sygor was a new one, of course. There just wasn't any percentage in space war. The distances of space—and even the warped expanse of inverspace—were prohibitive. Send a fleet out, and perhaps five years later you might learn they'd been annihilated, or that they needed supplies. So if they were wiped out, you had to start fresh, from a time-lag of five years when an enemy could get to *you*. If they needed supplies, you didn't bother about it, because it took five years for the message to get to you, and another five for the supplies to get there.

Ten years? No, space war was a game for madmen.

Aslik had started a space war. Ergo, Aslik was a madman.

But the madder they came, the more dangerous they could be. And it seemed this galaxy-master, this mad Aslik, was the most dangerous

of all. He had swept out from the far reaches of the tiny Spinxa Cluster, and now here he was—hundreds of thousands of light-years away, and in only three years. It was a tribute to a man of daring, and a man of wild purpose.

There would be no underestimating Aslik.

Nor did I oversell myself. I was a space trader—a dealer in valuables—from world to world. A man with no home, and only a ship beneath his boots. They said I spread culture where I went, bringing news and trading, but I'd always laughed at that: seers were always ready to slap handy tags on wanderers like myself.

I was a gypsy and I knew it. I never tried to be anything more. When a six-foot blond with black eyes named Loper Martin thundered down into atmosphere, all I expected the natives to say was, "Here comes the trading post! Get out the colored beads!"

And here I was, a trading post, embarking on a mission to save a galaxy. I was much more than staggered; I was stunned.

"Much further?" I asked Vedria.

She didn't turn around, kept walking. "Not much," she answered casually. She

was holding the three-threader loosely, so I assumed there was no danger.

I thought a little more of the Forest, of Sygor, and of this proud, high-born woman walking before me. There were enough factors there to make me want to settle down for good on this many-colored planet.

If I came out of this with anything approaching a whole skin, I was going to look into it.

Then Vedria stopped, and indicated a tree-trunk.

"There," she said, and stepped back. "Lift it up."

I walked over to it. It was firmly anchored into the yielding soil of Sygor. "You mean disrupt it?"

"No," she said quickly, motioning my rifle down, "I mean lift it."

I tossed her an odd glance, and she smiled, motioned me to do as she said.

I stepped closer to the tree-trunk, and gave it a shove. It moved slightly. I slung the rifle across my back, and heaved at the trunk. It came up a little.

I dug my boots in, and put my shoulder against the thing. It started to edge up out of the soil, and little pieces of dirt that had built up around the edges, tumbled

under. There was a huge hole under the tree-trunk. I continued to heave up, and it was lighter than I'd thought—but not *too* light.

In a minute the thing reached mid-point and its own weight held it up. It was counter-balanced beautifully. The ground was a milky-white, around the edges of the hole, under the trunk, so I knew someone had used a depressor field on it.

Vedria stepped over to the hole, and I noticed a huge, winding staircase that went down into the ground. She started down it, and I grabbed her arm.

"Hold off a second," I said warily. "You may trust me, and this may not sound gentlemanly, but for the first time I have a little doubt about *you*. What's this?"

She grinned up at me, but it was a wan smile. "My father showed me this years ago . . . and told me if I ever needed an escape route from the Palace, this was it."

I shook my head. It didn't make sense. "The Palace? But the Palace is in Capitol City, halfway around the planet."

"Yes," she said slowly, "I know."

She started down the stairs

and I couldn't do anything but follow her. The darkness was thick as musk, and as we went down, she said, "Pull that lever in the wall."

I looked where she was directing, and pulled down the lever. It came down heavily, and I knew instantly what it was. The counter-balance for the tree-trunk trapdoor. Even as I pulled the lever to its bottom notch, the tree-trunk shivered at its tipping-point, and fell with a clang. All light was instantly blanked-off, and the staircase was an ebony nothing stretching below us. I started to press my cigarette lighter, but I heard Vedria say, "Give it a few moments. It's over four hundred centuries old, and there are slowdowns all along the system."

I had no idea what the hell she meant, but I put my lighter away. A few seconds later the staircase began to glow, and a moment later the entire shaft—and I could see now it was over a mile deep—was brilliantly lighted. I could see no fixtures, and the light streamed around us evenly from some hidden source.

"What — what is this place?" I asked.

"The Elder Race built it. It goes down to . . . well, you'll see soon enough. But this may

be the one way we can save Felara and stop Aslik."

Then she pattered ahead of me, down and down and down the winding, spiraled staircase.

I followed her, marveling at the inlaid stone of the passage walls, and the length of each step platform. It took me three steps to cross each one—and I'm six feet tall.

Whoever these Elders had been, they were a giant race, and no mistake.

I followed her silently, only the slap-slap of her bare feet and the clump-clump of my boots making any sound in that passage. A passage which had been constructed long before the Earthman had exploded into the night of space, and long before the men of Aslik had threatened that explosion.

To say it was unbelievable, would be beggering the place. It was the *most* unbelievable place I had ever been in.

It stretched up, up, and up, through the ground, for a full mile, and it ran on so far I could only see a golden distance. It was a metal tunnel, completely without break or seam. Like some river of gold that had solidified, and had made a tube in the earth. Without protuberance, with-

out attachment, without bulge or break.

"This was made by the Elders." I said it. There was no question. It had *had* to be made by them; no mortal man could have constructed such an edifice.

"Hundreds of thousands of years ago," she said, and her voice was a sibilant whisper. Yet it resounded echoingly down that expanse.

"What is it for?" I asked, hoping the answer would be one I could conceive in mundane terms.

"It is an anti-gravity subway," she answered, and I knew I had not received my mundane answer.

"I don't understand," I said.

"You will in a moment," she said. "When I key it on."

I was about to ask her where it led, what it was composed of, what other uses it had, but she simply said, "*Thawk-ulla!*" . . .

. . . and I was lifted up and hurled.

. It wasn't a force, it wasn't a catapult. It was as though my body had lost all weight and substance. As though I was a power-driven feather, shot from a blow-gun. I felt something on my body, however, that kept me from touching the round inner wall

of that tunnel. It kept me in the center of the tube as I was driven down its expanse.

My breath was not ripped from me, and no sensation of nausea hit me, as I'd half-expected. I was merely traveling, as I might be traveling in a sport-jet or the *Pitchman*. At an incalculable speed—a speed that blurred the golden tunnel about me to a whisper of shimmering nothing.

I couldn't see Vedria, but I was sure she was nearby. And I traveled. Faster than I'd ever believed anyone could in normal space.

It couldn't have been more than three minutes, but I calculated we had gone under the Rainbow Forest, under the canyons, under the gigantic sea that spread itself blackly across half the planet, and further.

Then, as I began to wonder if I would ever stop this wild flight, I did. I came to a slow-down, and the next moment I was standing—whole, unexcited, breathing normally, and thousands of miles from where I had begun—in the other end of that tunnel.

At the other side of the planet Sygor in Galaxy 5.

"We're under the Palace," Vedria said, her words muffled by the blackness of the

caverns about us. "In the vault-mazes."

I was still bewildered from the vastness of the trip I had just made. Across a planet, in less than three minutes, with no visible means of transportation, sensations I had never known before.

"How do we get out, and what do you think we should do?" I asked.

"I'm — not — quite — sure . . ." she said, and I could tell there was a worried expression on her face. She had taken a bold step—led me to the Rainbow Forest, led me through the Elders' subway, led me to this spot beneath the Palace—but was now at a loss for plan.

"I remember coming down here when I was very young," she said, "and I've always had a good memory. I thought I remembered the passages in this maze, but . . . but they seem to be different. Perhaps if we walk a little, I'll remember the way."

So we walked.

The passages wound off each other, straightened, ended in deadways, doubled back on themselves, wound in spirals till they narrowed to false corners, stretched for immense distances, only to end where they had begun.

We walked for three hours

by my chronoring, and finally we sank down in the dust of the maze, totally lost, and knowing it.

"I don't remember," she said unnecessarily.

I slumped against a wall, wondering if this was where my years as free-trader would end. In a dust-hole under the Palace of Sygor.

Then the wall shifted, slid back on a pivot, and realigned itself. The maze had changed subtly.

The movement started other movements, and all down the way I heard other walls lifting, other walls still lowering, and more walls remolding themselves.

"My God!" I cried, "they've constructed this thing so it shifts itself. No wonder you can't remember the way it was when you were a little girl. The thing changes every time someone leans against a wall."

"You said Aslik's guards had been down here trying to find the Machine?" She nodded. "Well, then it's obvious this damned thing has been shifted many times. We're trapped. And if we don't rot to death, we'll starve to death first."

If I sounded bitter, she couldn't have held it against

me. I was lousy with bitterness. I didn't much feel like dying.

In the darkness I could only see the movements of her, not the expressions, but I sensed something was wrong.

She didn't answer my tirade, but her body stiffened, and I knew she had gone into one of those deep-trances with her brother Felara.

"Fuh — Fuh — Fuh — Felara!" she whispered, and then got up.

She didn't say any more, just started walking. I had an idea the stresses had been set up, and Felara was homing us in. Whether he was doing it properly or not, I couldn't tell. But I stayed away from the walls, so he wouldn't have more trouble. Once, Vedria touched one of the twisted walls, and it rolled into the ground. All down the line new walls shifted into position, and she abruptly changed direction. The boy was doing a good job—conscious or unconscious.

Finally, I saw light tinging the walls, and a few minutes later we came out into a huge amphitheater-like place, pillars rising to the dome of carved glassite. The light streamed down blindingly, and Vedria gasped as she was

struck full-force by the shafts.

She snapped to wakefulness and passed a hand through her matted blonde hair. "What . . . the mazes . . . where are . . ."

And then she saw where we were, and she gasped out, "The vaults! The Machine! It's here! Here, Loper, it's in here somewhere!"

I looked around and saw the crypt-like doors—twenty feet high each—set between the pillars. They were faceless black, with a ring-pull set in each.

I walked to the nearest one, and touched it. Though it was almost uncomfortably warm in these subterranean crypts, that metal was chill-cold . . . a frightening contrast.

I drew back. "Which one is it?" I asked Vedria. She came toward me, and I felt her hand on my arm. It was the first time she had touched me voluntarily, and somehow it eased the pressure off me.

"I—I don't know," she said.

"Well, contact Felara and find out which it would be."

She strained then, and her brow knotted and her fists clenched and her body trembled, but after ten minutes we both knew the connection had been broken.

"Why? What's the matter?" I asked.

"They may have him in some kind of prohibitive deep trance, or he may be using his telepathy elsewhere, or—" then she gasped, and said, "—no! I know why he won't answer. He knows if he connects with me—and this is all subconscious—to let me know where the Machine is, he'll trigger off the thought of the key-in phrase, and activate the robot."

"And with us down here, thinking death at Aslik, the robot would char our brains as well as any of Aslik's guards!"

I moaned low, and she turned to me. Her face was a study in beautiful urgency. "Loper, we've got to find that Machine!"

"Well," I said, "if there's no other recourse, there's always this little fifteen-thread disruptor over my shoulder."

She looked dubious, but I spread-legged myself in front of the nearest door, thumbed off the safety, and depressed the firing button.

The solid blue threads of agonizingly released energy streamed out—like a line of rope, like many lines of string, all bundled together and traveling together—

splattered against the door, and crackled off into nowhere. I released another burst. It spattered energy across the width of the amphitheater. The noise of the *szzzzz-crkkk!* filled the place with echoes, and smoke rose up.

But the smoke rose up only from the dust that had collected through the centuries, because there was no harm done the door. It was solid and unmarred as before I'd shot.

Whatever metal that door contained, it was like no alloy I had ever seen. I've been from Pocopuss to Xenaly IV, from one end of the galaxy to the other, but I've never seen a metal with those fantastic properties! It was completely impervious to anything I could throw at it. I walked over and ran my finger tentatively over the spot where I'd aimed.

The metal still held that queer chill feeling.

Vedria moved up behind me, and the chill had spread out from the metal, run through my hand and slunk down my back; when she touched me again, I jumped, and whirled around with the fifteen-thread aimed at her stomach.

The tenseness in me eased, and I unloosened, letting the

rifle slide down. "I don't much care for your Elders, Vedria," I said. The entire set-up bothered me. To be frank, it scared me. I wasn't at home with any race who could construct metal to withstand compressed energy.

"They frighten me sometimes, too, Loper," she answered.

But we were no nearer finding the Machine than we were to rescuing Felara.

There were fifteen doors, and each of them was solidly shut. Or were they solidly shut?

With the mazes being what they were, it was a safe bet no one had found the amphitheater. And if no one had found the place—except King Lormell when he'd come down to activate the robot—then one of these doors had to be open.

"Start pulling the rings!" I yelled, and yanked on the one in front of me.

It slid open smoothly, without effort, on an axis-pin, and I was staring into the smooth, gray-metal bulk of the Machine!

I stared up at the thing. When Vedria had said, "It's a robot—just a robot—that's all," I'd imagined some small, boxlike utensil-robot; the

kind they use at the spaceports. There was nothing to lead me to believe otherwise . . . there wasn't another robot like this in all of Galaxy 5!

It was a staggering twenty feet high, with an almost humanoid body: gigantic triple-wedged feet, massive jointed arms, a torso of the queerly cool metal, and a head atop the body, swiveled and ready to revolve a full three hundred and sixty degrees.

The face was a mechanical travesty of a human's. The eyes were coil-receptors, red and spiraling. The nose was non-existent, and in its place was a thin, tube-like projection, with a robot-sight on it. I had the vague sensation of worry that the tube was a weapon—a very accurate and *deadly* weapon. The mouth was a rectangular slash of mesh-grill.

At the side of its square head a small box rose out, and a whipcord antenna straightened itself from the box.

The thing's hands were the most fearsome of all. They were split into a pair of pincers, much like a soft-shell crab of Earth. The pincers, however, were not soft-shell; they were the queerly cool metal, and there was blood-dried and flaking—on them.

With one vicious swipe of those hands, the Machine could rip a man down the center like opening a package of quick-freeze asparagus. I moved back from it, and watched the thing silently.

Vedria, who had run to try another door, and had not looked over my way for several seconds, now did so, and gasped.

"You've found it!" she exclaimed.

"Yeah. Yeah, I found it," I answered. I was only half-happy to give that answer.

A weapon like this was fantastic. There wasn't a battleship or dreadnaught or thread disruptor or armada that could stand up to it. Constructed of the Elder's metal, and with its ability to char out a man's brain, make him alter his thoughts, defeat an army, it was invulnerable. But since it could be operated by good man or bad man, it was a double-edged sword and was not the ultimate weapon. It was only the ultimate destroyer.

I couldn't look at it any longer.

I've been in some pretty unpleasant situations: I've fought with spider-things from JawkThor, I've battled my way out of a blockade ambush off Galipolii, I've had to

pilot the *Pitchman* through a swarm of meteorites, the hull riddled and air seepage mounting—but I've never been so frightened as I was, just standing there and looking at that God-awful Machine.

I prayed, deep within myself, it would never be turned on me.

As though it had heard my thoughts, as though it had drawn some life-power from somewhere, the Machine's blocky head swiveled on the torso, and tipped down. The spiral eyes glowed red and fierce, and I seemed to detect an almost machine-like hatred blazing out at me.

Vedria screamed and stumbled backward. I was a step on top of her. I pulled up the rifle and aimed it.

Before I could push the button, knowing it would do no good, but having to do something, Vedria knocked my hand down, and away from the button.

"No!" she gasped urgently. "Think pleasant thoughts. Don't think death or destruction!"

So I thought pleasant.

I thought of the birds and the bees, I thought of beautiful women like Vedria, I thought of the Rainbow For-

est and of the clear black of space when you leave inver-space. I thought of my mother and father, long since gone to their rest on a fungus-planet called Luxor's World. But that got me onto death again, and I had to think of my kid sister, somewhere back on Earth. All the pleasant thoughts stumbled and bumbled through my skull—more of them at one time than I'd had in the last five years.

It seemed to do the trick. The Machine kept watching us, but it made no further move.

Then, it went dead again.

"Wh-what the b-blazes was that all about?" I shot at Vedria. I looked at her quickly, and saw she was in that telepathic trance with her brother. She was straining and sweating, her fists clenching and unclenching spasmodically.

Then it all faded, and an expression of utter weariness hit her. "He's dead," she said.

I didn't say anything. What could I say? I hadn't seen the Prince of Sygor, never met him, but his efforts in our behalf, even while under deep trance by Aslik's hand, had been enough to nominate him my personal saint. Now he was dead, and the two-way connection was

broken between Felara and Vedria.

"God rest him," I said.

"A lot of good that'll do him!" Vedria spat. And her face was a mask of intolerable fury and hatred. She wanted blood, she wanted death, she wanted Aslik's head ripped off and thrust bleeding atop a pike, to be carried into the Forest, for the animals to dispose of.

"He died under trance. They had him in a Pleasure House, so he wouldn't feel stress and activate the Machine. But they used too much trance-serum on him, and he died. But he got one last message to me! One thing he said!"

I was listening to the new ruler of Sygor, but it didn't sound like a ruler. It sounded like a sorrowful and confused girl whose whole family had been wiped out.

"He gave me the activating phrase for the Machine. The movement it just made was his trying to convey it to me mentally, even under trance.

"And now that I know it, Aslik won't get another chance to rule the galaxy!"

She turned to the Machine, then, and cupped her hands to her mouth. "*Deliver Us Oh Machine From Death!*" she

screamed, and instantly the robot came to life.

Its eyes lit up, its antenna-box turned slowly, and its huge hands closed with a clang!

Then it took a halting step forward, and I heard its leg-joints sizzle. As it moved, I caught a glimpse of one of those joints. *They weren't connected!* The jointed segments were held apart, by some sort of force-field. The thing moved then in a free, swinging motion, and two steps brought it out into the center of the amphitheater.

Orders, it said.

Orders, give me your orders. I am keyed to your orders. And the voice was like the crack of doom through a metal tube. It sounded high and roughly and bounced back to me from the arched expanse of the dome. The place resounded with the voice of that metal destroyer.

"Is it wise to use him?" I asked Vedria, and I had a fear that this Machine might be a greater peril than even the mad tyrant, Aslik.

"Use him?" she asked, her voice high and nervous. "Use him? You bet I will. I'll grind everyone of them into the soil of Sygor! They'll go back to

the Spinxa Cluster and never come out again.

"Lift us to your shoulder!" she commanded, and the thing bent toward us. One hand reached out for Vedria, lifted her carefully and set her on a flat, platform-like plate on its right shoulder. She grasped the railing around the plate, and the Machine bent for me.

Its metal hand closed smoothly, and I felt pressure around my waist. Then it had me swinging up and around, and an instant later I was standing on the left shoulder. My boots clicked to on the plate—though they weren't metal—and I was held almost magnetically.

"Now," Vedria spoke sharply, her words commanding, "find the Palace Pleasure House!"

And the Machine turned, strode out with long, smooth glides through one of the tunnels. He strode with a faint sizzling coming to my ears, and he hesitated not a second at corners or junc-tures.

Finally, the passages of maze came to an end, and we entered a corridor of natural stone. The Machine didn't hesitate there, either.

One metallic fist slammed against the wall, and it crumpled to stone-slivers beneath

his blow. He stepped through, and we were in a stairwell.

"This leads to the Palace wine-cellar," Vedria yelled to me, around the robot's head. "He just came up from the burial vaults and the sub-cellars."

And twenty minutes later, we were in the Palace!

The first guards that saw us were clothed completely in black and scarlet. They were lounging against a wall, guarding a door. The Machine came through the opposite wall, directly in front of the four men of Aslik.

The Machine's fist came through first, splintering metal supporting rods in the wall, crushing stone, showering plaster around the men. Then the huge automaton stepped through, and the little tube in its head showed what it could do.

Sickeningly.

The tube sprayed out a fan-shaped wedge of blue light, wrapped itself about the four guards, and they turned their thread-disruptors on each other. For a ghastly second the corridor was filled with the smoke of charred bodies, then they fell, almost as a man, and the smoke rose lazily, as we stalked away, riding the Machine.

It was that way throughout the Palace, till we finally came to a forty-foot glass door.

This is the Palace Pleasure House, the Machine said, and stopped dead.

"Enter!" Vedria said, and then, "Find Aslik and his guard! Wipe them out!"

I was horrified at the tone the girl's voice had assumed, but I knew it was a result of all the terror and agony she had gone through. Her planet overrun by a madman, her father and brother killed, herself dragged into space, and the sheer horror of being thrust into contact with this deadliest of all weapons.

I couldn't blame her, but it sickened me, nonetheless.

The robot strode forward, and I ducked behind the antenna box as he shattered the glass door.

Slivers of crystal ricocheted off the metal body, and I saw Vedria crouch down as an entire section of glass shattered across the metal beast's head. Then we were through, and into the Pleasure House.

I had heard about this place. It was maintained for friends and political relations of the King—those whose minds were on the pleasures of the flesh. As we burst through the door, the harem

women went scattering in all directions, through cubbys into the walls, and under the hundred beds.

In the center of the room, on a high table, with five white-coated surgeons around him, was the body of Felara. It had to be Felara.

He was bloated blue from too much deep-trance serum.

Dead, of course.

"Anyone allied with Aslik! All of them!" Vedria screamed at the robot. "Kill them!"

The robot lumbered forward, and even though I knew Aslik and his men should be put down, this mass slaughter was unbelievable!

"Vedria, no!" I yelled.

She wasn't even listening, she wasn't aware of anything but that bloated blue body on the table, and the men of Aslik.

"Oh, Machine, stop! Deliver us not from Death!"

It wasn't Vedria, and it wasn't me. I looked across the tapestried and bejeweled central room of the Pleasure House, and saw him for the first time.

There was no doubting who it was: Aslik!

He stood wrapped in pressure-armor, his head half-covered by the warp of a battle-helmet, and he raised

his arms to the ceiling, and the Machine stopped.

Vedria gasped, and it was clear in the sudden silence of the Pleasure House. "I got the key-phrases from your sniveling brat of a brother before he died, my dear," the madman said, and his dark face was split by laughter.

"Now we shall see who will rule Galaxy 5!"

I got a good look at him, in that timeless instant; a big man with a body like a bull. A face of darkness and eyes of cast-iron. A nose that was no nose at all—merely a protuberance. A mouth that was the mouth of a terrestrial crocodile. And the manner of a man who has seen the galaxy as a back-yard—and who has chosen it for his own.

That was Aslik, and I saw all this in the instant it took him to raise the three-thread hand-disruptor. He lifted it, aimed it, and the intertwined blue threads sizzled up toward the head of the Machine.

The blast was intended for Vedria, and if it had hit, her body would have been ruptured and torn, exploded outward like a puff of foul air, to spatter the walls with flesh and bone bits. But she saw Aslik's movement, and ducked down behind the bulge of the Machine's neck. The bolt

slashed up and sprinkled itself uselessly off the robot's body.

"Move Oh, Machine! Move! I command it!" Vedria screamed desperately at the robot. But it did no good.

"Stay where you are Oh, Machine!" Aslik directed the robot, and the Machine began to smoke. From its eye-spirals came thick ropes of black smoke. From the unconnected joints of its body the smoke poured in a blackening tide. From the mouth-grill and from the antenna-box near me—the smoke billowed and spun out chokingly.

"Vedria! Vedria!" I gasped abruptly, realizing what it meant, "get off, jump down! Slide down the Machine's back! It's going to explode! It's got too many contrary orders . . . you and Aslik have it locked in directives! It's gone schizophrenic—it's going crazy—it's about to blow its circuits!"

"Get off! Quickly! I'll cover you!"

Aslik had seen the smoke, heard my voice, and for the first time seemed to realize Vedria was not alone. His guards drew toward him at this sign of danger, but he motioned them back a step, and raised a pointing finger to me.

"So!" he bellowed echoing-ly in the Pleasure House, "You are the meddling intruder who would not take a warning and leave Sygor! Well, we shall see how you'll take the warning now!"

And up came that three-thread. The beam spat out, sizzled toward me, but I wasn't there any more.

I dove off the back of the robot, fell toward the wall, and grabbed a tapestry to break my fall. The rifle bumped painfully against my back as I slammed into the wall, and felt the tapestry rip under my hands, but it let me down gently, and I turned around quickly, to crouch and aim at Aslik.

Before I could draw aim, the robot exploded.

It spat sparks, billowed more smoke, and then, with one agonizing shriek of rent metal, the thing flew apart deafeningly. I was knocked flat by a section of leg plate, and pulled the tapestry over me as shrapnel continued to fall.

Off to my right I heard Vedria scream, and prayed she had gotten off the Machine in time.

A few minutes later I looked out. The Pleasure House was a shambles. The beds

were aflame; the walls were pocked by flying metal, and plaster dropped like snow; the huge table on which the dead Felara had lain was overturned; the Machine—of course—was gone, and so were half a dozen of Aslik's men. They lay stretched in weird positions on the floor, bits and shards of metal protruding from their heads and bodies.

Then I heard the moaning wail of a madman. I looked up, and there, on a balcony, at the far end of the Pleasure House, was Aslik. Wrapped in battle-armor, carrying his three-thread as if it were another arm, he screamed down his hate and defiance:

"It took me three years to conquer the galaxy! Three years, and nothing will stop me! You have taken away the Machine, but you can never kill the Immortal Aslik! I shall live on and rule on and conquer on and . . ."

Vedria slid out of the rubble at my feet, ripped the fifteen-threader from my hands, and with the practiced skill of a woman who has hunted since she was a child, she set the lever at maximum output, and pressed the depressor.

He was a clean shot all the way.

The blast took him in the

chest and face, and as we watched, his body grew, grew, grew and then—exploded!

The mad Aslik was gone.

She wanted me to stay. There was no real affection between us, of course. We were merely two people who had been thrown together in a time of war, and now that time was over.

But she still wanted me to stay.

"Why, Vedria?" I asked. We stood in the Rainbow Forest. She had had me flown across the ocean to the *Pitch-man*. "You won't have any trouble with the remainder of Aslik's men. They were only poor peasants and craftsmen, shoved into fighting-ships and dragged along by the power of Aslik. Now that he's gone, they'll straggle in one by one to your jails, so you can send them home."

She looked at me carefully, her face quite serious.

"We need a man to rule Sygor, Loper. I can't handle the planet alone. I'd like you to stay . . . be the new King."

Then I realized what she was saying, what she was offering, what she was asking.

As if she had read my thoughts, she said, "That's right. I want you to marry me, and rule by my side."

I looked deeply into that beautiful face, and for a moment I almost accepted.

Then I thought of her as she had been when we'd broken into the Pleasure House. The way death and destruction had overcome her. I thought of that, and I thought of the way she had killed Aslik. No, this woman was not for me. Not even if it meant losing the kingdom.

But actually, I thought, what was I losing?

I looked up into the night sky of Sygor, and watched the stars in their unending progression. I watched them march across the night sky like the sentinels of Forever.

And I knew, as I'd always known—as I always *would* know—that I was a wanderer. A minstrel of money, a pitchman in the *Pitchman*, a trading post on jets.

I was from space, and back to space I must go.

"No, Vedria," I said. "Thank you, and I wish I were worthy of you, but I'm only a trader. And one of the things I learned early in life is that a mouse should never attempt to be a lion."

"I leave lioning to the lions." She stared at me, and I thought I detected a glazing in her eyes. "Or the lionesses!" I added.

She turned away then, and ran into the Forest, the shimmer of her veils and gown billowing back like wind-vapor.

I took one last look at the planet Sygor—at this its most beautiful spot—and walked back toward the *Pitchman*. I was going to have to hurry to catch up with my routine.

There were people waiting for me to blast-in.

I slipped one foot over the port-ledge, and stopped. I looked back at the Forest. I was leaving Sygor, and at that instant, I knew one thing: I knew the planet had been soiled for me. Whether by Aslik and his madness, or Vedria and her animal cunning, I knew that here was a world that would be a brawler till the end of time. It was marked for restlessness.

It had tasted violence, and even the quiet princess of this world had learned a man must fight for what he loves. They had fought, and they had won, but I wondered how much they had gained.

I stepped into the *Pitchman* and dogged the port.

When the planet fell below my trail of flame, I headed out, knowing I would never come back. Never back to Galaxy 5.

THE END



EVERYTHING'S DIFFERENT UP THERE

By GENEVIEVE HAUGEN

Things had come to a pretty pass when two respectable citizens couldn't welcome a friendly extraterrestrial without being tested for the mad house!

THE insanity hearing of THE PEOPLE *In the Best Interests of ABNER PETERSON and ABIGAIL PETERSON* was in progress

before a mid-western jury.

Although the Petersons were a simple, hard-working elderly farm couple they had attracted a large crowd to the



wood

county courthouse. Perhaps it was because they had been known and respected throughout the community all their lives and were pillars of the church. They had never been known to indulge in an unconventional thought or act.

It was the minister of their own church who had reluctantly sworn out the complaint, a man of unquestioned integrity who had just tearfully testified to the jury that the Petersons, his two most dependable parishioners, had come to services one Sunday with cheerful smiles and announced they were resigning their membership.

When pressed for an explanation they said they had been converted to a new faith by a missionary from a good neighbor planet who had landed in their wheat field in a flying saucer. They earnestly avowed that the alien religion did not conflict with theirs—merely added to it and made it more workable. According to the Petersons, the other-world missionary had selected them as the first native pioneers to help spread their gospel on Earth.

Then had come the testimony of the psychiatrists who explained that basically Abner and Abigail were well-

adjusted personalities but they had suffered two great tragedies which had thrown them off balance. Their only son had been killed in a war and their only daughter had died of polio just before the advent of the Salk vaccine. Since then they had lived alone and to themselves, even to the extent of sharing the same hallucinations.

At this point, the jurors had asked, "Then why not let them live alone with their hallucinations? Thus far, all the testimony has been to the effect that they are doing a good job of taking care of their farm and not bothering anyone else."

This resulted in the sad explanation that such delusions, if allowed to progress without modern methods of shock and/or drug treatments, would ultimately result in such deterioration that the helpless victims would become public charges, whereas early treatment often resulted in lasting cures.

This point was unarguable to a jury who humbly admitted no knowledge of medicine or psychiatry, and things looked pretty dim for the Petersons.

Now it was the turn of the defendants to take the stand.

Legally, of course, one is not a "defendant" in an insanity trial. The action is merely brought "in the best interest of—" The negative result, however, is the same as in that of a criminal prosecution—incarceration. The jury was aware of this and they were also aware that the cost of such confinement came out of their own tax dollars. The Petersons would have to be unmistakably psychotic before they would be committed to an institution.

Despite this favorable aspect of the situation, the Petersons somehow managed to sabotage their own cause by testifying to what they obviously and sincerely believed to be true. They gave a straightforward narrative of a startling event that left even the imaginative teen-age group among the courtroom spectators gasping in disbelief.

In substance, it went as follows:

Behind on their chores, Abner and Abigail were hurrying back from the hogpen at twilight, eager to partake of their own evening meal now that the farm animals had been fed.

A sudden glow caused them to look toward the wheat field. A disc-like object

was settling noiselessly between the furrows. No harm resulted to the crop, so Abner sighed in relief. "Beats all, these modern inventions. Must be some new kind of airplane. Dish up an extra plate of stew, Abby, and I'll go welcome whoever it is."

By the time Abner led his unexpected guest in from the wheat field, Abigail had the kitchen table neatly set with an extra plate and napkin and the teakettle was warming merrily.

When Abner brought the visitor into the kitchen Abigail exclaimed, "Well, I never!"

Abner scratched his head in puzzlement and drawled, "That's just what I said, Abby. I never saw a two-headed human being before either. Remember that two-headed calf our cow dropped twenty years ago? Didn't live more'n a day."

Remembering her manners, Abigail smiled warmly at their peculiar-looking guest and said, "Welcome to our home. We don't often have visitors out here on the farm. You've already met my husband Abner, and my name is Abigail. What is yours?"

"Hishers," replied the heads in chorus.

For a moment Abigail was

nonplussed, then remembered her duties as hostess. "Please sit down and start eating. You must be hungry after your journey."

Although she knew it was rude to stare, Abigail could not help stealing a few long glances at her guest while dishing up the stew. From the shoulders down its body was clothed in loose-fitting mechanic-type coveralls of some serviceable gray material which did not sharply outline its body features except to the extent that it was of average height and build and had two arms and legs in proportion to that of all other normal human beings. There was nothing unusual about Hishers to disturb Abigail except the fact that two distinctly different heads stemmed from a single neck.

The left head was definitely masculine. It had a slight stubble of unshaven beard, crew-cut brown hair, hazel eyes and pleasant features that appeared to be about 30 years of age.

The other head, however, was undoubtedly feminine. It had russet curls, blue eyes and more delicate features. Her mouth was too large for real beauty and her nose was heavily freckled, but she also

looked young, normal and good-humored.

Abner had already seated their guest in the extra chair at the kitchen table, and Abigail tactfully set two separate plates of food before it, then sat down to share the evening meal. She was gratified when Hishers started eating with both heads, the left hand spooning the food into the left mouth and the right hand performing a similar service for the right mouth.

Glad that her guest appeared to be relishing her cooking, Abigail relaxed and beamed. "It's nice to have visitors again. Abner and I haven't been around much lately except to go to church. I guess our neighbors got tired of coming to see us when we never go to their homes in turn. Where are you folks from?"

Abner laughed and slapped his knee. "Abby, that's the silliest question I ever heard," he said fondly. "You called them folks, but as any dunce can plainly see they're only one person."

Abigail thought this over, then chuckled. "Guess you're right, Abner, but I'll admit I'm a mite puzzled." She smiled at Hishers. "I reckon

you're the only one who can settle this argument." She jumped up and hurried to the stove. "Land's sake! Almost forgot the coffee."

While she was pouring the cups the left head of Hishers explained, "We are from Alpha Centauri."

Abigail nodded. "Must be out of State. I know every hamlet, town and city hereabouts but that's a new one on me."

"That's right," agreed Abner, reaching for another hunk of home-baked bread with which to sop up the juice. "Queer-sounding name—Alphy Centaury. Where's it located?"

The right head of Hishers took a sip of coffee and replied, "It's the nearest star to this solar system."

Abigail almost dropped her cup in surprise. "Fancy that! You mean you've come *that* far?"

"Beats all," agreed Abner, shaking his head. "Shows how fast times are changing. We've isolated ourselves too long, Abby." He smiled whole-heartedly at his guest. "I'm right proud to meet folks who would take all the trouble to come from another star to visit us."

Abigail hustled up to bring out the apple pie from the

warming oven. "My! If I'd only known I'd have baked my special cocoanut cake. It won first prize at the county fair."

While all three—or was it four?—of them were enjoying the apple pie, they chatted comfortably. The Petersons learned that Hishers was a missionary who had been sent out to a new territory in the galaxy to convert native inhabitants to their religion. This was their first visitation to Earth as it had taken until now to convert their own solar system.

Centaurian scientists had developed a lingual device no larger than a pea which, when implanted in a certain section of the brain, enabled the wearer to interpret alien languages and communicate with them in their own tongue, which was why Hishers was able to converse intelligently with the Petersons.

"You have such an interesting name," beamed Abigail. "Does it have some special meaning?"

The left head nodded seriously and said, "I'm His." The right head smiled shyly and explained, "I'm Hers."

Abner guffawed. "That's rich! Get the point, Abby? His and Hers make Hishers."

"Why of course!" exclaimed Abigail delightedly. "It sounded so alien at first, but when you put the two words together it's real homey-like."

His did most of the talking while Hers remained modestly unobtrusive. They were in such complete empathy that neither head contradicted the other, yet each had a charmingly individual personality.

"How come you landed in our wheat field?" asked Abigail as she dished up second helpings of the pie. "Gracious! We're not important people, so it couldn't have been just to visit us. Abner is real good at fixing things—had the tractor running again in no time at all. If your flying saucer had to make a forced landing perhaps he can help you fix it."

Abner laughed and slapped his knee again. "Just like a woman! Think a man can do anything just because he repairs the plumbing."

His replied earnestly. "It was not an accident. We surveyed this area before landing and our empathometer indicated that you are the most truly integrated couple in this section—a husband and wife in such complete accord that they are as one."

Abner and Abigail flushed with pleasure. "We've never

had a quarrel. Fancy you knowing that! Is that why you came to see us?"

Hers smiled benignly. "We've come to convert you to our religion. It is called Sacred Fusion."

The Petersons looked at each other in bewilderment. His was already explaining, "Our worship of God is based on a solid foundation—harmonious family life. Don't you agree that's important?"

"Oh, yes," chorused Abner and Abigail.

"Wars, strife, crime, can all be avoided if families learn to live together, not only with themselves but with the rest of humanity as one big happy family."

"That's just what *our* preacher tells us," agreed the Petersons.

Hers spoke with zealous fervor. "To achieve true harmony in family life the husband and wife must be as one. Is not that what your own marriage covenants state?"

"Our church recommends it too," concurred the Earthlings.

"Yet you Earth people are always being split asunder by divorce. Broken homes lead to maladjusted souls, delinquency, warped minds and

violence of all description. All this could be avoided if husband and wife were *truly* one, as *we* are!"

The Petersons gasped in unison. "Then you weren't born that way?"

"No. Human life on our planet evolved quite the same as on yours. We, too, went through a long period of misery and strife before the discovery of Sacred Fusion. But all that was dispelled."

"Land's sake!" exclaimed Abigail. "Then you were once two different people with only one head apiece?"

"That's right. But when our ministers perform the marriage ceremony they truly unite us. Our bodies are blended with the exception of our heads. This harmonious fusion of body cells produces complete empathy so that we always understand how one another thinks and feels, therefore there is never cause for misunderstanding or conflict. We automatically hatch an egg every two years which produces a normal child."

"Sounds like a right sensible idea," nodded Abner. "If it works for you it ought to work for us. Trouble is, we don't know how it's done. Guess our scientists aren't that smart, and I'm sure our minister don't know how to

go about performing that kind of marriage ceremony."

His and Hers looked at each other, smiling radiantly at this ready conversion, then spoke joyfully to Abner and Abigail. "That is what we have come to teach you. Our first task was to persuade you to accept the idea. . . ."

The jury was not out long. The vote was unanimous.

Unhappy and bewildered, Abner and Abigail huddled together as the minister of their church approached them with genuine sympathy. "Please forgive me for swearing out the complaint," he begged. "I had to do it. It

was for your own good."

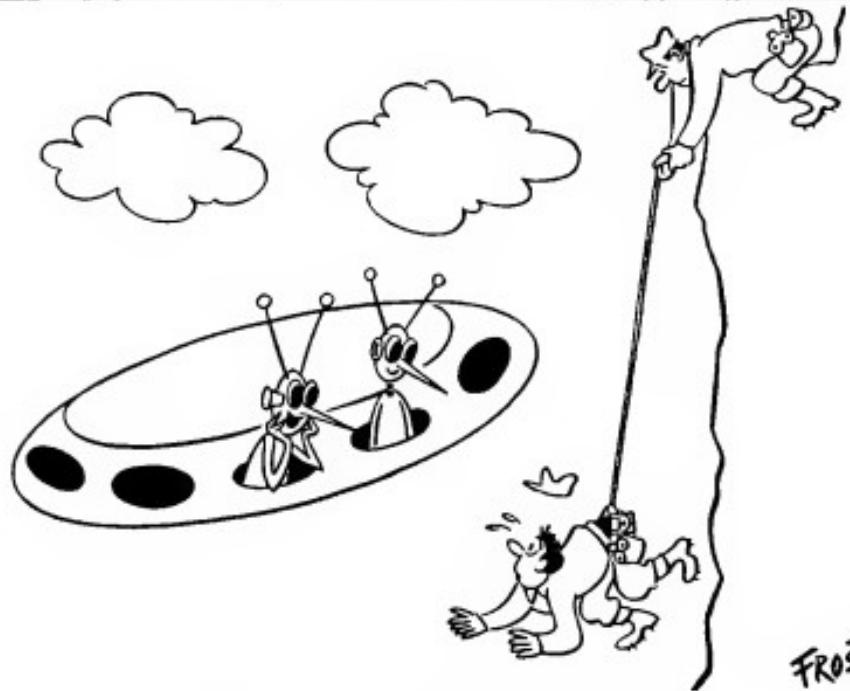
"Are you sure it isn't because you don't want to believe in Sacred Fusion?"

"Of course not. It's just that you've imagined the whole thing. Two-headed people simply can't exist. You claimed Hishers would come back in their flying saucer to act as corroborating witness, yet where is he, er, she . . . ?"

The spectators were now rising from their chairs to leave the courtroom, there was suddenly a weird shriek.

Hishers entered and went straight to the Petersons, exclaiming, "We're so sorry to be late, but our flying saucer had a flat kip."

THE END



"He's the first one we've seen with a tail."

FROSTY

THE SPACE HORDE

By CHAD OLIVER

Scientists have been known to state with authority when referring to certain planets or galaxies, that conditions could not support "life as we know it." But that leaves a big opening. What about life beyond our conception?"

LOOK UP, and out, to the stars.

Look along the light-years, across the gulfs of immensity, out through a universe of thinly-starred darkness. Look, if you will, through tubular telescopes with concave mirrors two hundred inches in diameter. Look out into your universe, out and out and out—

You cannot see it all.

For the Earth is dust, dust floating in a black and endless sea. Space is a word, a feeble man-mouthed symbol, and it stands for a sea that mocks the imagination. Space is a sea, a titanic deep, an ocean. Space is no gentle lake, no friendly pond that welcomes the painted toys of children. Space is an ocean of vastness beyond comprehension, an ocean that is—

Alive.

A seething ocean adrift with millions and billions of floating islands, their faces

turned toward galaxies of suns that flare and pulse and hurl radiation from many-colored atomic furnaces. A boiling maelstrom acrawl with life, life that slithers and creeps and walks and glides beneath liquids unimaginable.

Oceans are the birthplaces of life, and on the billion shores of this huge mother-sea there is—

Everything.

And out of that sea, out of that dark ocean of life, one day They came, as They had to come. They pushed past man's little outposts and space stations as They would kick aside the strewn toys of children. They came as a hurricane, a ravening cyclone of alien life, thundering across cities as though cities were so many flimsy native huts and science only a primitive magic shrieked into the cutting teeth of the wind.

They came.

They came searching, hun-



The deadly slime moved irresistibly forward.

gering, for reasons unguessable.

They came in screaming metal shells and the shells thudded into the Earth like hail. The shells cracked open, eggs bursting with life, and They came out.

And They subdivided.

They multiplied, spread out in bubbling circles, acid on the Earth. They ingested, They consumed—

Everything. Anything.

Insects, lizards, trees, rabbits, men.

They came from the mother-sea, from the ocean of dark immensity. They came to the Earth, thirsting, wanting—

And They could not be stopped.

In a farmhouse only sixty miles from Paris, a haggard man took a few minutes too long to decide what he would carry with him. He got his wife and his eight-year-old daughter and they ran for the road under a warm, blind sun.

The sound, the hissing, bubbling sound, was all around them.

The girl began to scream.

There was a terrible scorched smell in the air, a smell of meat left too long on the fire.

The family was cut off.

The man threw down what he had in his arms, heaved it into the undulating, colorless mass. It disappeared. He picked up his daughter, ran back to the house, found a ladder. He helped his wife climb up to the roof, boosted the girl up the ladder, climbed up himself. They went as high as they could go and hung on.

It took a long time. The sun lazied through the arc of afternoon.

The stuff bubbled through the farmyard. A tree fell into it with a dull plop. The tree disappeared.

The house began to tremble, to slide—

They hung on, the man and the woman and the child, not even screaming now.

The house crumbled under them.

They—fell in. . . .

From outside, through the open window, the sound came. It came in waves, rising and falling, like a chant. It was made by fifty thousand human voices.

The sound came from the football stadium.

"Close that blasted window," Adrian Hackett said, grinding out his cigarette against the untidy pile of butts in the ashtray on the

polished brown table. "That lament for the dead is driving me nuts."

Of the three men in the room, the biologist Owen Landseer was closest to the window. He heaved his stocky frame out of his chair, reached out with his powerful hairy arms, and pulled the double-windows shut with a surprisingly gentle motion.

They could still hear the prayers from the stadium, but the sound was muted now, a faraway wind sighing through nameless trees.

Landseer sat down again, hunching his big shoulders. "Maybe we should join them. My wife is over there now."

Quincy Rice, from the primate lab, snorted. He pulled at his neat, square beard. His voice was surprisingly loud for such a small man. "Nuts," he said succinctly. "We've got a job to do. Let's do it."

Ade Hackett fired up another cigarette, knowing that he was smoking too much, thinking what Donna would say if she knew. Funny to worry about that now. "We're one hell of a long way from being another Manhattan Project," he said. "Of course, there are thousands of other research teams working on this thing, but no one else is

hitting it quite from our angle."

"I'd feel better if we *had* an angle," Landseer said gently. "I don't see one yet, but maybe I'm a little on the obtuse side."

"Puns, already," Quincy muttered.

"We've got five days to turn in a preliminary report to the United Nations," Ade said. "The situation is simple. Those things, whatever They are, landed on this planet slightly over a month ago. I guess most of us never really thought that Earth *was* a planet—it was the world, the universe, all there was. We weren't worried about space; we thought we had troubles enough here at home. Result: we're helpless, absolutely helpless. We're all set up to defend ourselves against the wrong enemy."

Outside, the prayers from the football stadium continued. They made a steady background, a surf of sound breaking against the granite rocks of a lonely shore.

Ade felt the tension crawling within him. He hadn't tried to eat any breakfast and he had been sick after lunch. Donna had been in London visiting her mother, and now she couldn't get out. All the transportation facilities were

tied into a monumental knot. Sure, They weren't in England yet, but the Channel was narrow, so narrow, and They were boiling across rivers in France. . . .

He looked at his cigarette. She had been after him for years to cut down on his smoking.

"The papers and the newscasts are making with the same old junk," he said. "We're making jim-dandy progress, the solution is near at hand, keep calm—all the usual bromides. The fact is that we haven't been able to touch Them at all. We don't even know what They are. Apparently, They can nullify our best weapons with ease. Planes can't get near Them. Missiles with hydrogen warheads just drop in the middle of that stuff and are *digested*. Chemicals have no effect. So far, we haven't even been an irritant. We might as well not be here."

"They've just hit the three places, that right?" Quincy asked, filling his pipe from a red tobacco can.

Ade nodded. "There are three centers. One in France, one in East Africa, one in China near Peiping. If They go on expanding at the present rate, we've got less than

two years left to us. Probably not that long—the riots and the epidemics have already started. And there may be other landings. They could be right here in Michigan tomorrow."

The word hung in the smoke-blued air of the room. *Tomorrow.*

Owen Landseer involuntarily glanced toward the door.

"They won't use the door, Owen," Quincy said, puffing on his pipe. "They just multiply right through the wall."

"Cut it out," Owen said nervously.

"I talked to General Massinger this morning," Ade said, ignoring the byplay. "They've got that report from the Rand boys."

Quincy raised his eyebrows.

The room was suddenly very still.

"The guys at the Rand Corporation have fed all the data we have into the big computers," Ade told them. "Unless those data were all wet, which is hardly very likely, there's only a very small possibility for error."

"And?" prompted Owen Landseer.

"And the computers figure that man's survival chances are precisely zero," Ade said quietly. "Given the nature of the problem, the kind of

brains we have to work with, and the amount of time available, there is no solution. In plain English, gentlemen, if we ourselves are the best defense Earth has to offer, then man has had it. We're through."

There was a long silence in the little academic room with the polished brown table and hard wooden chairs.

Outside, the chanted prayers rose up from the football stadium and lost themselves in the wind and the sky.

Tanganyika Territory, East Africa.

Highland country, rich grasslands surrounded by towering volcanic mountains. Flat-topped acacia trees, flowers nodding under the sun, warm and pleasant days.

It had been a good place to live.

Mud-roofed huts grouped in a circle, with an outside fence of thorn-brush for protection. Humped cattle, some with long, graceful horns, some with stubby horns. A smell of milk and cattle and native beer—

And a smell of terror.

They have come: out of the sky, across the lakes and fields.

A sound: hissing, seething, bubbling.

The village is empty now, the people are gone.

They move in, taking Their time. Eating, digesting, destroying. There is no hurry. Grass, frantic cattle, sheep, a few donkeys, and then the fragile huts themselves. . . .

At the doorway of one of the huts, framed by the darkness within, a small boy, rubbing his sleepy eyes. Left behind somehow, forgotten in the haste and the confusion and the fear.

He looks, listens.

He cries out a word, a child's word, an uncomprehending word. He calls to his family, his clan, the world he has known. They have never failed him before. He expects gentle arms, warmth, reassurance.

There is nothing.

The boy begins to run, crying, his eyes wide.

He steps into the bubbling, hissing mass.

He has no foot.

He pitches forward, and he is gone. His screams continue for an impossibly long time.

Only the sky is clean, for They have taken the land.

High in the branches of a tropical forest, half-hidden in pools of shadow, an animal nibbles at a wild fruit with sharp white teeth. It is a small

animal, no larger than a rabbit. It has bright, alert eyes and its coat is soft and brown. It cocks its head as though listening, but there is no sound. Then it moves gracefully along the high branches from one tree to another. Half a mile away, invisible in the cool green shadows, another animal licks out his long red tongue, catches an insect, and waits.

Ade Hackett shifted his position on the hard chair and chewed on a menthol cough drop to get the stale taste of smoke out of his mouth. He wasn't sleepy, and in fact he knew that he would be unable to sleep without a pill when he finally did get to bed, but he was in that flat state of exhaustion where a man just keeps going on nervous energy. His bloodshot eyes burned in his skull.

Ade was a paleontologist, and a good one, but he seldom thought of himself that way. No man, to himself, is merely a paleontologist or psychologist or butcher or mechanic or writer. A man is many things: a scientist, perhaps, but also a guy who likes to get drunk once in a while, make love, tell jokes, go fishing. Ade was a tall, skinny man with a tough, weather-beaten

face and blue eyes that had twinkled in happier days. He was no lover of crowds, and there were those who considered him unfriendly. He was most content when he could get outside in the lonesome western canyons, feel the sun on his back. He loved to sleep under the warm stars where he could hear the frogs croaking along the banks of a mist-cloaked river.

Sometimes, Ade figured that paleontology was more an excuse than anything else. Fossil-hunting was like fishing: it gave a man a reason to get off by himself, get off where he could smell the trees and the grass and the sand and the woodsmoke, get off where he could be a man again, and be happy.

If it hadn't been for Donna, he would have been tempted to go off somewhere and enjoy himself. If the world had to end, it would be better to face it in the clean air under a blue sky. A conference room was no place to shake hands with death.

He would have been tempted, but he wouldn't have gone. There were times when a man just didn't run away.

"Okay," he said. "Our job is to turn in a preliminary report. We don't have to prove anything. We don't even have

to think that our idea is very likely. We're up the creek without a paddle, and we have to do the best we can."

Owen Landseer nodded, his heavy features haggard with strain. "We're faced with a problem we can't solve," he said. "And if we can't solve it—"

"Check," Ade agreed. "Our business boils down to one simple question. *Are we absolutely certain that man is the highest life-form on this planet?* All of us are supposed to be experts on the process of evolution. Has evolution stopped with man—or is there something else?"

"You mean we're looking for a kind of superman?" Quincy Rice nudged his beard with his red tobacco can. "Nothing to it. All we need is the Abominable Snowman. We track him down, clap him on the shoulder, and say, 'Well, Abominable, old bean, how about lending us a hand?' Then Abominable giggles abominably, shoves us off a cliff, and we're right back where we started."

Ade laughed. He hadn't laughed in a long time. "Afraid our job is a bit more fundamental, Quincy," he said. "There are other research teams exploring the possibility of *Homo superior*.

No, we're looking for something else." He paused, fiddling with the cellophane wrapper from the cough drop box. "You know, we chatter a lot about mutations and advances and one thing and another, and yet we always seem to assume that the next step up in evolution is going to be a development of *man*. But isn't that really contrary to everything we know about past evolution?"

Owen Landseer frowned. "I see what you're getting at. The first amphibians came from the lobe-finned fish, which weren't very advanced fishes. The first mammals came from a very primitive reptile group, before the dinosaurs or the snakes had even evolved."

"In other words," Quincy said, leaning forward, "what comes after the mammals?"

"Exactly." Ade lit another cigarette, excited now despite his weariness. "If you look back over the fossil record, there's one very interesting fact. The first fish came from the Silurian period of the Paleozoic, around 390 million years ago. The first amphibians came later in the Paleozoic, and so did the first reptiles. About 190 million years ago you get into the

Mesozoic, the so-called Age of Reptiles, but in terms of evolution the Mesozoic is mainly important because it gave rise to the first mammals and the first birds, both of them offshoots from the reptiles. And then the last great era, the Cenozoic, got underway around 55 million years ago. We're still in the Cenozoic. And, gentlemen, what new vertebrate class has evolved in our Cenozoic?"

"Zero," said Quincy Rice, lighting his pipe with a wooden stick match and then carefully breaking the match before he tossed it into the wastebasket.

"Zero," Ade agreed. "In the whole Cenozoic we don't get a single new *kind* of animal. Sure, we get the Primates, winding up with men, but the primates are just one special type of mammal. What's happened? Is there some unknown animal hiding in the brush today, just as the first mammals scurried under the feet of the dinosaurs? *What comes after the mammals?*"

"Maybe nothing does," Quincy suggested.

"Do you believe that?" Ade asked.

"No," Quincy admitted cheerfully, puffing on his pipe.

"There's one point, though,"

Owen Landseer said. "It could be that physical evolution has more or less been by-passed. Julian Huxley and others have shown that you get a basically different kind of evolution in man. His culture, his way of life, changes without a corresponding change in physical type. An ant society can only change genetically because the ant lifeway is essentially instinctive, but man *learns* his way of life by means of language. There haven't been any fundamental changes in human physical structure for at least fifty thousand years, but our culture has changed plenty."

"I'll buy that," Ade said, "but it only applies to man. We still haven't obliterated other forms of life on this planet—how much effect have we had, say, on some of the wilder parts of the Amazon jungles?"

"But look here," Quincy objected. "You're asking us to perform an impossible task. How can we imagine a radically different form of life? How can we speculate about an animal as far above us as we are above the lizards? I can't see how we would have much better luck than a bright ape back in the Miocene would have in trying to dream up New York City."

We're limited by our own mental processes, after all; that's why fictional supermen are supermen, nothing but magnified human beings."

Ade lit another cigarette, inhaled, and almost at once ground it out in the overflowing ashtray. "You're forgetting something, Quincy. We have one important advantage over that bright ape of yours. We've got a tool to work with: the scientific method. We know something about the processes of evolution, and we've got the record of past evolutionary development to work from. There are some consistent trends in evolution: in patterns of reproduction, in the efficiency of energy utilization, in the growth of certain parts of the brain, in the circulatory systems, in the placement of the limbs. If there is something on this planet higher than the mammals, I think we might be able to make some pretty good guesses about it. I think we've got all the information we need, locked up inside our own three skulls. All we have to do is drag it out and look at it."

"If the animal exists at all," Quincy said.

"It had better exist," Ade said grimly.

It was raining in Peiping: a dull gray rain that fell endlessly from a leaden sky.

Lapping at the city like a nightmare swamp, They bubbled and heaved over what had been roads and collective farms, fields of grain and cotton, barnyards alive with pigs and poultry. The rain fell into Them with sodden splashes, and was gone.

There had been some two million people in Peiping. Almost a million of them were still there, milling through the streets.

They came. They hissed and bubbled. They nibbled at the edges of the new housing developments, sucked at the old courtyard homes, licked at the streaming streets.

On an old brick wall, a smiling portrait of Chairman Mao.

They ate at the wall, slowly, brick by brick.

A dumpy short-haired woman in a quilted blue uniform watches them, her dark eyes wild.

She screams.

She runs at the wall, claws at Them, fills her hands with the elastic, colorless bubbles—desperate movements . . .

She looks at the stumps of her arms.

She falls forward, her eyes wide open.

She is a lump, and then nothing.

A terrible, burning stench fills the wet air, until even the rain is a stinking, evil thing, falling, falling. . . .

The trees stand on strong bark-covered legs and far above the jungle floor they spread out the green umbrellas of their branches to make a roof for the world.

In those trees, two animals, side by side.

They smile, sharing each other. Oh, yes, they can smile—smile with lips and eyes and minds. You might see them from below, brown coats blending into the bark of the trees. You might think they were monkeys or even squirrels, for you would not see them well.

You might even take a shot at them, but you will miss.

They sit there quietly, smiling, looking down.

Thinking?

Perhaps.

You might call it that.

Ade Hackett hung up the telephone in the hall and walked slowly down the corridor past the deserted classrooms. He went back into the little conference room, fighting a blind sense of panic.

"They've landed in Ohio," he said.

"Where?" asked Owen Landseer.

"Near Akron."

"And?" said Quincy, cleaning his pipe.

"We've thrown everything at Them up to and including the kitchen sink. Nothing. So many spitballs. We're evacuating the area."

"And then what?" Quincy asked.

Ade shrugged. "You evacuate areas until there aren't any more areas to evacuate. Then you sit and take it."

"They'll be here in Michigan soon," Quincy said.

Outside, they could hear the swell of voices from the football stadium.

"Let's get with it," Ade said. "Owen, you keep notes, will you? You're the only one with a decent handwriting. Now, what have we got?"

They went to work. It was nothing very impressive, Ade thought. No fancy lights and big computers. No hysterics. No shouts of "Eureka!" Just three guys sitting in a room, trying to do the toughest job—

Trying to think.

There was one thing that made it easier. Obviously, if the animal existed at all, and if he was capable of action against the things, he didn't know of Their existence;

They had encountered no opposition. Therefore, the animal didn't live in Africa, France, China, or the United States. When you subtracted those, there were only a few possible places where such an animal might be found: the polar regions, the wilder areas of South America, some scattered islands.

Think, damn you, think!

Well, what would the animal look like?

It would be an offshoot from the mammals, obviously. But it would not be a development from the most complex and specialized of living mammals; evolution *always* builds on simple, generalized forms. It wouldn't *look* very spectacular. The first rat-like mammals hadn't been very impressive, and the *very* early mammals, the transitional forms such as Cynognathus, hadn't even looked like mammals at all.

See him?

Small, furry, inconspicuous. . . .

It would have a good brain. The dumbest mammal looked like Einstein if you compared him to a fish or a frog or a dinosaur. But the animal wouldn't just be smart as a man is smart. It would *use* its brain differently. Man found the capacity to symbolize, and

thus to create a language. The next step would be to eliminate the *necessity* for language. . . .

A silent animal, to our ears.

Man's brain can grope its way ahead, step by step, and communicate its findings to others by language. It can proceed logically by trial and error, it can build on past results.

Next?

A new brain, a different brain. See it? It is a short-cut brain. It sees relationships, quickly and accurately, and it sees them *intuitively*. No need to pack around a warehouse full of facts. It perceives answers at will *when and if it needs them*. They are simply there, as a man sees a club in a fallen branch. And if two beings always evaluate situations in the same way, if they really *understand* each other, what is there to communicate?

And if a brain knows its own power. . . .

Babies?

There would be few births. Twins would be unknown. The female would have a very long pregnancy. An individual would be born almost fully mature, eliminating the long period of youthful helplessness.

See him?

He looks like a simple mammal. He would have evolved from a generalized animal—

Like an opossum.

Like a tree shrew.

He lives in tropical country, where the trees are thick. In the Old World, probably. An island, perhaps—

Like Madagascar?

The three of them, Ade and Owen and Quincy, turned in their report to the United Nations.

A long shot?

Certainly.

What else can you do when your back is against the wall, the blindfold over your eyes, the rifles of the firing squad lifting in the sunlight?

Outside, the prayers continued.

They kept coming.

They seeped across the fields under cloudless blue skies, They poured into towns and cities beneath a silver moon and frosted stars.

They kept coming.

Man could not stop Them.

But man was searching—

High in the trees that thrust their green arms toward the sun, lost in jungle-shadows, the two animals sit on a branch. They are silent, enjoying the cool shade.

They turn, looking, before the sounds come.

Men, hacking their way across the jungle floor.

Men.

Funny men! Oh, they know men. They see men even in the jungle depths. They listen to the hums and buzzes in men's minds.

Men are comical.

Men are the biggest and the smallest animals in the jungle.

They think they rule the world.

The young like men. They look and listen and laugh. Sometimes you had to join them. Men are funny! Yes, they are cute. You have to give them that. . . .

New thoughts.

New hums and buzzes.

The two animals sit more erectly, more alertly.

They close their eyes to see better—

Help.

If we could only find them, if only they exist.

Where could they be?

What can we say to them?

Death. Destruction. A jelly-sea rising on the Earth. Eggs from the stars, eggs that hatch into living bubbles that eat into the very land you walk on. Bubbles. Devouring, ingesting, hissing—

Oh, God, Mary was in France. . . .

Not here yet. Looks so peaceful. Wish I had a drink of water. Feet are tired. They'll be here, they'll be everywhere.

Crazy animal. Dream animal! Doesn't exist!

Wild goose chase.

What time is it?

Help!

Assistance!

Where are you?

No use—

Oh, God, Mary was in France. . . .

Feet hurt.

Where are you? Where . . .

Men.

Funny men!

Men are always worried.

Comical.

The two animals move higher into the trees, seeking concealment. They blend into the bark of the branches. They sit quietly.

They care little for men, though men are cute.

But they love their land, their winds and flowers, their long nights and lazy afternoons.

Those images.

Those things from the star-sea.

Alien.

Hostile.

Dangerous?

They had better be stopped. They should not be allowed to come further.

The two animals walk along the high branches toward the center of the island. Other animals converge on the place, taking their time, enjoying their world. The sun is warm, the earth below them fresh and moist.

There are many of them. There have never been so many in the circle before. They fill the trees. They do not touch. They do not speak.

Their eyes are closed.

Concentrate.

Frequencies?

Project.

While it is still daylight there is nothing to see. A faint vibration in the air, perhaps. Heat waves. A tension. Electricity. Other animals are nervous, uncertain. Somewhere, a dog howls.

Then twilight.

Night.

See it?

A crackling electric blue. It is not bright but it hurts the eyes to look upon it. A sheet of vibrating blue fire. A field, an aura. It hovers over the island, taut, shimmering.

It pushes out, seeking, searching—

Finding.

Hurting!

Burning!

Fire, searing at alien nervous systems.

Concentrate!

Simple.

Men are so funny.

Always making a big thing out of nothing. Of course, they can't understand, not really.

They *are* comical!

Men.

But they are cute.

You have to give them that . . .

The change came with startling abruptness.

The hissing torrent of alien life had washed over the Earth like a tidal wave from an infinite sea, smashing all before it. They had come, and They had expanded, grown, multiplied. They had been a monstrous cancer eating at the life of a planet, and They had seemed invincible.

And then They—stopped.

Suddenly.

Completely.

Some said that the electric blue haze visible in the night sky had something to do with it. Some said that it was the will of God. Some advanced learned explanations concerning metabolic exhaustion and chemical poisoning.

No one knew.

But They stopped.

The crowding pressure

ceased. The edges of that colorless mass of jelly began to shrivel. They did not die, whatever They were. They simply contracted, flowing back, leaving a lifeless husk behind. They retreated, recombined, snaked back along invisible biochemical threads toward the original centers of radiation.

They flowed back through the inert crust—

And there was a heaving, a trembling, a volcanic upheaval deep in the Earth. The sunken metal shells screamed up through the lifeless muck, dripped into the sky, flashed back—

Back through the blue skies and white clouds, back into the dark ocean of life that had spawned Them. Back to the billion-shored mother-sea, back to the ocean of stars.

Behind Them, They left vast sheets of colorless, crusted matter: strange new glaciers to gleam and melt beneath a golden sun. And They left other things behind Them—

A memory.

A fear.

A promise.

A vault of night, dusted with diamond stars: a night that would never again be soft and comforting, a night that had become a window

opening on a seething maelstrom of life, life that slithers and creeps and walks and glides beneath liquids unimaginable. . . .

And a naked, terrible sky.

But the land-choking crusts shriveled and blackened and disintegrated. The rains came, and the husk became a scum that fertilized the soil.

Plants began to grow, and green grass.

And men came back to their lands.

Ade Hackett sprawled comfortably in his favorite easy chair, his sleeves rolled up over his tanned arms, his feet propped indecorously on the glass-topped coffee table. He could hear Donna whistling an off-key tune in the kitchen as she brewed her magic on the stove. Around him he sensed the security of his home: the paintings, the books, the sectioned fly rod, the pleasant clutter.

He jiggled the ice in his Scotch, sipped it, felt the smoky liquid warm him all the way down.

"When I was a kid," he said, "we used to boil grasshoppers, just for the hell of it. Drop them into a tin-can full of hot water and watch them turn pink. I don't like to think about that now."

Quincy Rice, sitting cross-legged on the floor, puffed at his pipe. "How about me? I work in a primate lab, Ade. We experiment with chimpanzees when we can get them. Sometimes we test new medicines on them. Sometimes they die."

"Funny, isn't it," Ade asked, "when the shoe is on the other foot?"

"We don't know that."

"Don't we?"

"I read a piece in the *Times* this morning. Seems the alien life-forms just got indigestion from old Mother Earth. Statistics and everything. Very scientific."

"And the blue lights?"

"Atmospheric phenomena, my boy. Five leading astronomers have proved. . . ."

Ade put down his empty glass, clasped his hands behind his head. "Quincy, I think we saved the world, or a good part of it."

"You'll never prove that."

"We may not have to."

Quincy stroked his beard. "Meaning?"

Ade uncoiled himself, sat forward. "What if we were right? What if that animal of ours really exists? What if we did make contact with it? Where does that leave us?"

Quincy grinned. "Behind the well-known eight ball."

"Exactly. Quincy, we're the dinosaurs now—or at least the apes. We don't know anything about those hypothetical animals of ours, but we know what they can do. They may not stay put on that island forever. I don't think they're hostile toward men, or we would have heard from them before. But they're just beginning. They may want some more room before long."

"And then?"

Ade shrugged. "Depends on what they think of us. Look, we don't hate apes, do we? Of course not. We like them. We think apes are pretty sharp. But the apes are headed for extinction, just the same."

"Be kind to your web-footed friends," Quincy said.

Ade laughed, reached for a cigarette. "It's out of our hands, of course. And it won't happen in our time. It might even be that we could be useful to them, somehow. Just the same, Quincy, I kind of like men. I happen to be one. I don't think we're through yet."

Quincy killed the rest of his Scotch. "It did come at an interesting time, didn't it?"

Ade nodded. "Whenever man gets himself into a hole, his culture gives him something so he can dig himself out again. I've heard a lot of

prayers lately, and maybe we ought to offer some thanks for technology. We're on the verge of going out into space.

"We're going to need those spaceships, Quincy. Yes, those ships will give us time. We may lose the Earth, but the universe is a big place. I have a hunch that man hasn't reached the end of his road yet, not by a long shot. And next time we run into Them, we'll be ready."

"I hope you're right."

Ade got to his feet.

In his mind, he saw an animal. Furry, inconspicuous.

"I wonder what he thinks of us," he said quietly.

High in the jungle trees where the clean sunlight falls in mottled pools, an animal sits alone and not alone. It nibbles at a wild fruit with sharp white teeth.

It is a small animal, no larger than a rabbit. It has bright, alert eyes and its coat is soft and brown. It cocks its head as though listening.

A man, walking across the jungle floor far below.

Funny man!

The animal smiles, sharing a secret joke.

Men are comical!

Men are cute.

You have to give them that.

THE END

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF AMAZING STORIES, published monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1957.

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G. E. CARNEY,
Business Manager

[SEAL]

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 27th day of September, 1957.

VICTOR C. STABILE, Notary Public
(My commission expires March 30, 1959.)



"I don't know what she wants but I wish they'd give it to her."

THE MIND MERCHANTS

By O. H. LESLIE

NEVA hated bringing home the evening paper. She dreaded the way her husband Cal snatched it eagerly from her hand and shuffled his way to the classified advertisements. She knew what would follow. His hard-breathing examination of the close-printed columns, his snort of disgust, his throwing aside the crumpled sheets at the base of the wheel chair that was his prison.

But tonight was different. He greeted her with a wan smile when she came through the door, his thin, scholarly face reposed. When she put the paper on his lap, he opened it calmly, and even glanced briefly at the headlines before turning to the Employment section.

Encouraged by his attitude, she said:

"Cal, don't look tonight. You know how it upsets you—"

He grinned at her. "It's

You've seen ads offering books, correspondence courses, and even personal instruction. In the future all that could change. You may see ads reading: "For Sale. My Mind and Everything In It."

okay, honey. Tell the truth, I'm feeling pretty good tonight. Won't bother me at all."

"I'm glad." She went to her knees and put her blonde head into his lap. He stroked the long, soft strands. Even in the poor light of dusk, he could see the gray hairs already infiltrating the gold. The sight of them almost restored his bitterness; Neva was only thirty.

Then he was cheerful again. "Okay, beautiful. Let papa read his paper. Who knows? Maybe I'll find the ideal ad. 'Wanted — psycho-semantist, must be invalid. Good pay, short hours—'"

"Cal . . ."

He rumpled her hair. "Come on, Goddess. Put papa's potatoes on, I'm starving to death."

She got up, kissed him quickly on the mouth, and went humming into the tiny kitchen of their two-room



Cal was being stripped of a life-time's knowledge. Neva wept.

flat. Cal Donahue spread the newspapers open and traced his finger down the Help Wanted ads. It didn't take much study to determine how fruitless the search was. His specialty was scholastic, and what was worse, esoteric. His other talents were limited. His physical capabilities were few. Cal slapped the arm of the wheel chair, and fought down the anger and self-disgust that was rising in his chest.

Then he flipped the page over and read the Buyers and Sellers notices. As usual, it was dominated by the Know-How agents and brokers, and individual K-H offerings.

For Sale—Thorough knowledge of mineralogy by accredited college graduate. Crystallography, geology, mining. Over 12 years experience in field work. Contact Adams K-H Agency, N.Y. 7.

For sale—Complete knowledge of French language. School-trained, actual resident in France. Owner must sacrifice. Call OXFORD 5-9900, after six.

For Sale—Stress engineer entering new field wishes to dispose thorough knowledge. Equivalent three years col-

lege, four experience. Will pay K-H fee. Contact Harvey K-H Agency, 150 Grand St., Bklyn.

Cal skipped rapidly down the column, looking for the Wanted to Buy ads. He found what he was looking for: the advertisement which appeared in every edition.

Wanted—Knowledge in all and varied fields, no limitation. Highest prices paid, all K-H agency and lab fees arranged. Contact Mann K-H Agency, 585 Madison Avenue, New York 17.

He was still looking at the words when Neva came out of the kitchen, a tidy apron around her slim waist. He smiled at her, and enjoyed the mirrored pleasure in her face.

"Oh, Cal," she said. "You don't know how good I feel when you're like this."

"Why shouldn't I feel happy? I got flattered today. Does wonders for the ego."

"Oh?" She tilted her head in a mock gesture of wifely jealousy. "All right, who's the blonde?"

"You're the only blonde in my life. No, as a matter of fact, it was a little bald-headed man, from a place called

the Mann Agency. One of those mind brokerages."

Her face darkened. Neva didn't like to hear about the K-H agencies; the whole system of buying and selling brainpower unnerved and frightened her. Cal had tried to explain the process once, but she had clapped her hands over her ears and refused to listen. It was unholy, unGodly. Trading knowledge with the same cold disdain you juggled stocks and bonds . . .

"What did he want? What made him come here?"

"I'll tell you. From what I gathered from my little bald friend, the whole Mann Agency is a house-shop, set up to serve one man. He was pretty cagey about it, but I'm sure that's the story—"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Well, you understand how these K-H agencies operate. They're just like brokers. People who want to sell their knowledge come to them looking for buyers. Same thing works in reverse. They get a fee, and everybody's happy."

"But they don't—" She swallowed hard. "They don't do the actual—business."

"No, they don't do the transferring. That's up to the buyer and seller; they can go to any authorized K-H Trans-

ference Lab they want. But here's what I figure about the Mann Agency; I figure they're owned by Emerson Wheary."

"Who?"

"Wheary. You've heard me talk about him. He's the big money man. Owns the largest string of atom plants in the country. Only now Wheary's tired of collecting dollars. He's buying brainpower."

Neva shivered. She glanced towards the kitchen, listening for the comforting, everyday sound of water boiling in the pot. She didn't like talking about the subject, but Cal's mood was too good to spoil. She said: "But why, Cal? What does he want all that knowledge for?"

"Who can say? Some guys get lots of dough, they want power. Maybe this is the kind of power Wheary wants. He's filled his head with more damned knowledge than anybody in the world. Only he's not satisfied yet."

"But why?"

"Beats me. He was a poor slum kid, practically illiterate. Maybe he's getting back at all the smart boys, buying up what they know. But who'd figure he'd want psycho-semantics?"

She was shocked. "Cal!"

"Don't get so upset," he grinned. "Papa's not selling. My little specialty doesn't put food on the table, but it's all I got."

"That's terrible! Asking you a thing like that!"

"Why not? It's business, Neva. I've got something Wheary wants, he offers money. Nothing to get upset about."

She trembled with loathing. "Ugh! It makes me sick. Robbing people's minds—yanking out their knowledge like—like a tooth! I couldn't stand them doing that to you, Cal."

"Not even for five thousand bucks?"

"Not for anything!"

He reached out and encompassed her waist with his big hands. She went to her knees to embrace him. They clung together like children, and then kissed like man and wife. After a while, Cal whispered:

"Sometimes I think I'm crazy. Maybe the bald guy was right. Five thousand bucks would help us, honey. It wouldn't go far, but it would help. Maybe I'd be better off having this psychosemantics stuff erased from my mind . . ."

"Don't talk like that!"

"It's true, isn't it? I'm not

much good to us, am I, Neva? I'm just a thing in a wheel chair . . ."

The depression was coming on him again, and she held him tighter, tighter, trying to ward it off.

"You're a genius," she said fervently. "Don't ever forget that, Cal. Those people at the university, they said so."

"Geniuses eat, too, honey. Their wives have to eat. Don't forget that book, Neva, that lousy masterpiece of mine. Five hundred and seventeen copies . . ."

"It was a fine book! The *Science Review*—

He laughed bitterly.

"Cal!" the girl cried, and the tension of the evening snapped within her, snapped like a taut thread. Tears fell, and in the kitchen, the water boiled over the rim of the pot.

In the morning, Neva woke late from a troubled sleep and had to rush Cal's breakfast. She was a Triple-A rated stenographer in the municipal service, but her high standing didn't excuse lateness. She kissed him hurriedly, and left.

Cal wheeled himself around the apartment when she was gone, trying to work up an incentive to return to the old battered typewriter that

squatted on the dining table. He was half-through an article concerning his specialty, a labor of infinite pains that would appear in a low-circulation scientific journal that paid its authors only in prestige. *Prestige and potatoes*, Cal thought wryly, *prestige fried*, *prestige baked*, *prestige sauteed*. It was going to be a bad day.

By eleven o'clock, he had pecked out eight lines of the article, and was grateful for the interruption of the doorbell.

The man who was waiting on the sill lifted his hat, and his dome glistened in the hallway light.

"You again?" Cal said. "I told you yesterday, Mr.—"

"Beech," the man said pleasantly, walking in and removing his velvet-collar overcoat. He handled the shiny-leather brief case under his arm with loving tenderness. "Yesterday was yesterday," he smiled. "I had an opportunity to talk to my client, and I'm prepared to make another offer."

"You're wasting your time, Mr. Beech."

"How do you know? I haven't said anything yet." He sat down and unlatched the thick metal locks on his brief case. "Now, simply be-

cause Mr. Wheary admires your intelligence, he's being very generous. Frankly, we think he's overstepped himself—"

"Look, fella, it's not a matter of price. I don't like this K-H business, and I don't want any part of it."

"Sure of that?"

Cal hesitated. "All right. Let's hear the figure. Then scram."

"Fifteen thousand," Beech said. Briskly, he took a bulky fountain pen from his pocket and unscrewed the cap. "Now the first place you sign is—"

"Hold it! I'm not signing anything."

"You probably didn't hear me. I said *fifteen thousand*."

"I heard you, all right. But even if you said *fifty thousand*, I'm not signing my brains away."

The bald-headed man stared at Cal with the same stunned but tolerant look a bishop would give a blasphemer.

"Ah," he said finally. "I know what's troubling you. You're a little afraid of the K-H process. I don't suppose I can blame you; lots of people have the wrong idea about knowledge transference. But let me assure you, it's as safe as—no, safer than a tonsillec-

tomy. The K-H machine makes a careful record of your brain patterns, and removes *only* those patterns concerning the area of knowledge to be tapped. You simply no longer have the knowledge; your buyer does. But otherwise, you're perfectly the same. So let's be reasonable, Mr. Donahue. The sooner we make the laboratory appointment—"

Cal fixed his eyes on Mr. Beech's bald head as if measuring the broad skull for a splitaxe. Then he growled something, wheeled to the door, and threw it open.

"Out," he said.

"But Mr. Donahue—"

"Out! Tell Mr. Wheary to rob somebody else's brain."

The bald man gathered his paraphernalia hastily and went to the door.

"All right, Mr. Donahue. Don't get frisky with me; I'm a business man. I'll report your reluctance to Mr. Wheary, but I really must know *what price is*—"

"No price!" Cal shouted. "Now get out of here!"

He slammed the door so violently behind Mr. Beech, that a framed photograph fell from its place on the faded wallpaper. He went to it and picked it up. The glass had shattered, and the radiating

lines almost obliterated the portrait of Neva and himself, taken on their wedding day. He had stood very straight and tall.

It took Cal almost two weeks to finish the article. When he was done, he squared the sheets on the dining table, and slipped them into a brown envelope. When it was addressed, he turned to Neva, who was sewing by the window, and said:

"Mail this for me tomorrow, will you?"

"Sure, Cal." Her brow furrowed as she looked at him. "Is something bothering you? You've been so quiet tonight."

"Busy. Getting my little masterpiece finished. Gotta hurry up and get it printed, so we can sautee the prestige."

"What's that?"

"Never mind." He wheeled over to the bureau and dropped the envelope on top. Then he picked up the mail that had arrived from the Mann K-H Agency that afternoon. He grimaced, and tossed it back, but not before Neva caught the look on his face.

"What is it, Cal? Who's the letter from?"

"Same bunch. Seems Mr. Wheary hasn't given up yet."

Last offer is thirty-five thousand. I've got a feeling it won't stop there. We could probably get a million bucks out of that screwball, if we held out long enough."

She slammed the fabric into her lap. "Don't talk that way. I couldn't stand you doing a thing like that. Even for ten million dollars."

"Don't worry, honey. It's the only thing I've got left in the world. No," he added quickly, "I don't mean that," and Neva smiled at him mistily and hurried to his side.

Some minutes later, the doorbell broke their embrace.

"Mrs. Donahue?" the man said. "I'm Emerson Wheary."

Her hand flew to her throat.

Wheary was a big man. His bulk overpowered the doorway. There was a hundred pounds too much on him, but expert tailoring had it neatly confined. His small features were embedded into his face, and his eyes were half-closed by the overhang of his heavy brows. He moved gracefully into the apartment. He wasn't smoking, but there was an aroma of costly pana-tellas following him into the room.

He took his hat off politely and said: "Sorry to pay this

unexpected visit. Hope you'll give me a few minutes."

Cal wheeled to face him. "What do you want, Mr. Wheary?"

"You're Calvin Donahue?"

"That's right."

"May I sit down?"

"Yes," Neva said, flustered. She was trying not to show her awe of the man; she knew how Cal felt.

His bulk made the chair invisible. "I'm not here to waste your time, Mr. Donahue. But in talking to Mr. Beech today—"

"Look," Cal said tightly. "Your hatchet man's getting to be a real pest, Mr. Wheary. I'd appreciate it if you'd call him off. I'm not selling anything in my head, understand. That's what I told him today."

"So I heard. That's why I'm calling tonight."

"Offer me a million bucks," Cal said. "I told my wife you would. Offer me a million."

"If that's your final price—"

Neva gasped, and even Cal was shaken by the promptness of his reply. Then the man in the wheel chair recovered his poise.

"Refused," he said. "Not for sale. Good-bye, Mr. Wheary."

"Wait a moment. I had a

different kind of payment in mind when I came here."

"What's that?"

Wheary smiled. He reached into a breast pocket and produced a slim cigar. He held it towards Cal, and said: "Would you smoke this for me? I'm not permitted them myself, but I enjoy the aroma."

"No, thanks."

The big man sighed, and put the cigar back. Then he folded his hands in his lap and said: "My price concerns something more precious than money, Mr. Donahue. To put it bluntly, the ability to walk."

Neva stood up. There was no reason for it; she had nowhere to go. She sat down again quickly, flushing deeply.

Cal was just staring.

"I know that sounds unusual," Wheary said. "But it's exactly what I have to offer. After your first refusal, I took the liberty of investigating your medical record, Mr. Donahue. It was very interesting. As you might have heard, I have a rather thorough grasp of several medical sciences—"

"Bought and paid for," Cal said.

"Bought and paid for, exactly. But they helped me

understand your problem. An unfortunate accident, damage to the lower motor neuron. You have my sympathy."

"So what?" Neva said, her voice shrill. "Say what you have to say!"

Wheary smiled at her. "There is a man," he said.

"So?"

"There is a man named Wickright, a rather famous doctor. You have your specialty, Mr. Donahue, Wickright has his. On occasion, he's performed a delicate and difficult operation on cases of your nature. It has always been successful."

Neva's intake of breath was loud in the quiet room.

"Go on," Cal said.

"I spoke to Dr. Wickright today. He's no longer a young man, and he rarely makes use of his surgical talents. His fees are high, too; ten thousand dollars seems to be the average."

"I don't believe it," Cal snapped. "I never heard of this man."

"And I," Wheary smiled, "never heard of psycho-semantics until this year. But now that I've heard about it, Mr. Donahue, I'm determined to own the knowledge. Do I make myself plain?"

Neva went to Cal's side. "No. Make it plainer, Mr.

Wheary. If Cal gives you his knowledge, will you guarantee that he can walk again?"

"I am almost certain. If you have doubts about my story, I suggest you call on Dr. Wickright himself. But you needn't plead charity, Mrs. Donahue; it's been tried. Wickright has an admirable attitude. If he acceded to every charity request he received—" He spread his hands.

"All right," Cal said. "If that's all you came to say, Mr. Wheary, we're through talking."

"Are you interested at all?"

Neva opened her mouth, but her husband stopped her words. "Not at all," he said. "Good-bye, Mr. Wheary."

The big man stood up.

"At least think it over," he said. "I know how trying this must be for you, Mr. Donahue. An active man like yourself, chained to that rolling prison. You could probably get a fine teaching job if you had your health. And, of course, your poor wife—"

"Get out!" Cal shouted.

Their visitor rose, bowed, and left.

Late on Friday evening, four days after Emerson

Wheary's offer, Cal Donahue woke from a wheel chair doze and glanced in sudden alarm at the face of the kitchen clock.

It was eight-thirty.

He stared at it without comprehension for a moment, and looked towards the dark patch of sky framed in the window. The stars winked back.

"Neva!" he said aloud.

There was no answer. He became frightened, and wheeled about the small apartment like a frantic, caged animal. He didn't think of turning on the lights for five minutes. When he did, he looked around the apartment, and listened to the quiet pulse of the empty rooms.

He went to the telephone and began to dial her office number. Then he remembered that the municipal agency which employed his wife closed their switchboard at six. He hung up and went to the door, listening for sounds behind it. She had never been this late before; if something had happened to her, Cal's life was over.

Then, at nine, he heard her familiar脚步声 on the stairs.

"Oh, Cal," she said as she entered, "I'm terribly sorry.

I—I had some shopping to do downtown. I thought I could manage to get home before seven-thirty, but the large crowds—”

“What did you buy?”

“What?” She ran her hand through her hair. He knew the gesture.

“You’re not telling the truth, Neva. You didn’t go shopping. Where were you?”

“I was shopping.” She slipped off her coat and went into the kitchen. “I’ll get your dinner in a minute—”

“Neva—”

“Please, Cal. You must be starved.”

“I’m not hungry. I just want the truth.” She was making too much noise with the pots and pans. He hit the wheel savagely and followed her. “What is it, Neva? What were you doing out so late? Was it—” He swallowed hard. “Was it a man?”

She turned so rapidly that her hip struck the handle of a pot and it clattered to the linoleum. She dropped to his side and buried her head in his chest.

“No! No!” Her voice was tear-edged and muffled. “I can’t let you think that, Cal! I can’t let you!”

“Then what was it?”

She looked up. “Money, Cal.

I made some money tonight. Maybe not enough, but if we can talk to this man and see—”

“Money? What are you talking about?”

“Seventy-five hundred dollars. It’s—it’s one of the best prices they ever paid. The man at the agency told me so. It was a really good opportunity, Cal, I had to take it—”

“Talk sense!”

“*The K-H!*” she screamed.

“What?”

“I went to the K-H agency on Tuesday. The one on Fortieth Street. They didn’t give me much hope at first, but then I got a call this morning. I wanted ten thousand, but they couldn’t find me a buyer—”

“A buyer for what?” he grasped her shoulders in his big hands and shook her. “A buyer for what?”

“My stenographic knowledge. I sold it!”

He released her, and his eyes swam dizzily.

“Cal, you have to understand.” She began to cry, but he offered no comfort. “I know how you feel about this thing, but sometimes it’s necessary. It didn’t hurt at all, really it didn’t! I just—can’t do the work any more. That’s all there is to it. I’ll have to

get some other kind of job—”

“Neva . . .” His face was tortured.

“This was more important, Cal. Don’t you see that? Now we don’t have to do business with Wheary. Now we can go to that doctor. We can pay him ourselves.”

He reached out and pulled her to him.

Cal hadn’t shed a tear since the accident that crippled him. But he cried now.

The taxi-driver was helpful. He came out of the car and went to the back, and put his strong hands beneath the wheel chair. Neva tried to help him, but he grinned and told her to step aside. With Cal’s assistance, he managed to get the wheel chair on the sidewalk, in front of the Fifth Avenue apartment building.

When he drove off, Cal and Neva looked at the impressive façade of the house. It promised interior magnificence.

“Well?” Neva said. “Ready to beard the lion?”

“Ready.”

She pushed him to the entrance. They went down a long plush carpet to the elevators, and once inside, pressed the button marked “eighteen.”

An elderly woman answered the door chime. She was dressed in black, with a high-neck collar. She was stern and dignified, but the redness around her eyes indicated recent tears.

She ushered them into the apartment. The façade downstairs hadn’t lied; it was magnificent.

“Dr. Wickright will be with you soon,” she said, and drifted off.

When the man they had come to see entered the room, they were startled at the realization of his age. The doctor walked with the support of a single crutch. His hair was patchy and white, the lines of his face deeply engraved.

“I wish,” he said, “that you hadn’t come.”

Neva stared at him. “I don’t understand. When I spoke to you last week—”

“I said I would talk,” Dr. Wickright answered, in a querulous, old man’s voice. “That’s all I said I would do. I didn’t mean for you to bring your husband.”

“But I thought you should see him. Examine him.”

“I know all about the case. Mr. Wheary wanted my professional opinion. I’ve seen the X-rays, and all the data.”

“Now, look,” Cal said, “I

know we haven't got enough to meet your price—"

"Price? Did I mention price?"

"Please, don't misunderstand," Neva said hastily. "We know it's not the money that's important. It's just that we want you to know this isn't a charity case—"

The old man's head was bobbing. He sat down with a groan.

"I'm not well," he said. "Doctors get sick, too—"

"Then you *can't* help us?" Neva cried. "Is that what you're trying to say? You can't because you're ill?"

"Ill? It's not as simple as that. Look at me! I'm not just ill. I'm old! I'm almost seventy! Isn't that reason enough?"

"Let's go," Cal said.

"No!" Neva said. "Dr. Wickright, please tell us the truth. Can you perform this operation, or can't you?"

"I could once," the old man said. "I performed it successfully only five months ago. But that was my last."

"Five months ago? Then you *can* do it! Just once more. You must!"

"I *can't*!" He went shakily to his feet. "I *can't*! Never again! All that's over with now—"

In the doorway of the ad-

joining room, the elderly woman in black appeared.

"Manford," she said very quietly.

"Eh?"

"Manford," she said, looking piteously at Neva and Cal, "tell them the truth."

Neva turned to her. "What truth? What do you mean?"

"He can't perform the operation," she said coldly. "He no longer knows how."

"No longer *knows*?"

"Tell them, Manford," the woman said bitterly. "Tell them what you did for your thirty pieces of silver."

"I had the right!" the old man shrieked. "I had the right! I'm old now. I'm entitled to some peace—"

"You sold it," Cal accused. "Isn't that what you're saying, Doctor?"

"Yes! I'm not ashamed of it. I sold the knowledge."

"Who was the buyer?"

"His name is Wheary," the woman said.

When the thing was finally settled, there was relief in the Donahue household. It was as if there had been a period of raging, infectious illness in their home, and now the fever was broken. They spoke calmly of the forthcoming day, only hoping it would arrive swiftly and be

done with. Cal worked meticulously and with dedicated speed on the final draft of his last article on psycho-semantics, and Neva buried herself in the elementary chapters of a treatise on stenography.

Then, on a Thursday morning, two weeks after their visit to Dr. Wickright, a low-slung black limousine purred into the parking space before their apartment building. A uniformed chauffeur, militarily brisk and commanding, rang their doorbell, and aided the woman in escorting her invalid husband to the waiting automobile.

They arrived at the Thiel-Scherman K-H Laboratories on upper Park Avenue half an hour later. Emerson Wheary was already on the scene, chatting amiably with the technicians who would perform the transference from mind to mind. He seemed at home here; he was relaxed. But the gray-haired, sober-faced man who accompanied him was tense and watchful.

"This is Dr. Moses," Wheary said, waving a plump hand towards his companion. "My personal physician. He's more like a bodyguard, won't let me do anything by my-

self." He smiled at Cal and Neva in turn.

Cal said: "Is it all right if my wife stays?"

"Perfectly," Wheary told him. "Now if we can get started—"

"Just a minute." Cal's voice was uneven. "I want to get our terms of agreement straight, Mr. Wheary. I don't want to see a dime of your cash, understand? I just want your assurance that you'll re-transfer the knowledge you bought from Dr. Wickright. Then I expect you to complete the rest of the deal."

"Don't worry, Wickright will cooperate. That's my price for restoring his K-H. But you can't expect me to guarantee the success of the operation."

Neva started, and Wheary looked at her paternally.

"Don't be concerned, my dear. It has never failed yet. You'll be walking with your husband in a few months. Now, gentlemen—" "

"One moment."

It was the sober-faced Dr. Moses, rising from his chair. "Before you seal this bargain of yours, I want to say something."

"Now, Laurence—"

"Don't try and stop me, Emerson. I've given up appealing to you on this subject."

Now I'm going to address my appeal to Mr. Donahue."

Cal looked at him. "What do you mean?"

"I mean this. As Mr. Wheary's physician, I forbade him this K-H transference. I want you to know that. More important, I'm going to ask you to refuse the transference yourself."

"What?"

"I want you to say no. I want you and your wife to turn around and go home. I realize how important this is to you. But there's something equally important involved. A man's sanity."

"I don't understand."

"Laurence is a worrier," Wheary grinned. "He doesn't know the capacity of the human mind—"

"I know *your* mind," Moses snapped. "I know you've overstepped the border of safety, Emerson. You've poured in more K-H energy than your mind can tolerate. The danger point is passed. One more transference—"

"It's *my* mind!" Wheary said sharply. "I know it better than all your charts and graphs!"

Cal's knuckles whitened on the wheel chair's arms. "Listen, if there's any danger involved—"

"Only to Mr. Wheary,"

Moses said. "I believe this transference will tip the scale—"

"Through, Laurence?" A thin smile appeared on Wheary's face. "Then I suggest we don't waste any more time. I have important business this evening. And I'm sure the Donahues wish to get this over with, too."

He waved three fingers at the technicians.

"We're ready," he said.

The chairs were of soft leather, and placed back to back. One of them was removed, and Cal's wheel chair substituted. They sat like human bookends between a labyrinth of electronic equipment. Behind them, a bank of computing machines blinked and chattered, ready to record the wave patterns that emanated from the old and the young brain. When the electrodes were clamped to the temples of the two men, the old one smiled confidently, the young one grimaced and grew taut in the chair. A sedative was swirled into two glasses of water, and they drank them down. A switch was thrown, and the computing machines hummed busily. A technician surveyed the spinning dials calmly, checking the readings against the

clipboard in his hand. More lights glowed, and a pen scratched on graph paper. A mechanism whined somewhere between the chairs. Still another switch was thrown. The whine increased to a sudden shrill scream, yet over the cacophony came the clear sound of Neva Donahue's sudden sob. Emerson Wheary, drowsy in his chair, muttered something and laughed.

The technicians began to move swiftly, without hurry. On the computing board, a row of red lights winked up and down and then flashed brightly and died. Wheary laughed again and said something, loudly but yet inaudibly. Neva put her hand on Dr. Moses' arm, and he let it remain there.

A moment of eternity lumbered by in the antiseptic room, and then there was silence.

Almost silence.

Wheary was still laughing.

It was a dry chuckle, a pleased chuckle.

Even when they unstrapped the buyer and the seller, his laughter continued.

"Emerson," Dr. Moses whispered.

"Dear God, please," Neva said.

Wheary laughed, and Cal

Donahue held his throbbing head between his hands.

"Emerson," the doctor said. "Are you all right?"

"Wise guy little rat," Wheary chortled. "Think you're so damn smart. Stick your nose in a fat book, see what it gets you. Twenty bucks a week, lousy soda jerk, see what it gets you, Richie—"

"What is it?" Neva said.

"He's talking about his brother . . ."

"Sit on your behind all night, talk about Picasso, grow a beard, live on peanut butter sandwiches, you jerk. Not me, Richie, boy, not me—"

"It's the sedative," Neva said. "It must be that—"

"No." Moses shook his head.

"You make me sick, you slob!" Wheary's voice was rising, his eyes focussing on nothing. "You useless egg-head! What'll it get you? A kick in the teeth! Twenty bucks a week! Get wise, Richie boy, get wise!" He laughed loudly.

Cal said: "What's wrong with him? What's he saying?"

"I warned him," the doctor said. "I told him he'd gone too far—"

"Dog eat dog!" Wheary

screamed. "This lousy world! What'll it get you, Richie? Hey, Ma, Richie's got his nose in a book! What'd I tell you, wise guy? Who's smart now? Twenty thousand bucks in a month, that's what I call smart. Biggest damn factory in town, no damn college boys on *my* payroll. Hey, Richie, want to sweep floors?"

"Stop him!" Neva cried, covering her face.

"It's too late," Moses said. "Unless—"

"Phi Beta Crap!" Wheary laughed. "That's what *I* say. Never read a book in my life, P & L statements, that's my reading. Look at you and look at me. Who's smart now? Who's smart now?"

"Unless what?" Cal said. "What can we do?"

"Reverse the process," Moses answered. "Take back your knowledge, Donahue. It's the only possible way. His mind doesn't have the energy; it needs relief."

Neva said: "Wickright. The operation—"

"I'll take care of that. I promise you. I'll see that he restores Dr. Wickright's K-H,

just as he said. But unless we work quickly—"

"All right," Cal said. "Quickly, then."

Dr. Moses signalled to the technicians. As they replaced the electrodes, he went to his patient and put his hand on his shoulder. He looked hard into Wheary's blank eyes and said:

"We're doing it again, Emerson. Do you understand me? It didn't take the first time, so we're doing it again."

"Smart guy," Wheary muttered, but submitted.

Half an hour later, it was done.

It was dark by the time the limousine brought them home. Neva stopped at the corner and bought the evening paper. She offered it to Cal when they were in the apartment, but he smiled and said no. Instead, he turned to the typewriter, rolled in a sheet of paper, and wrote:

*"Psycho-Semantics and
Society"
Chapter One*

THE END





THE SPACE CLUB

This will be the last session of The Space Club in Amazing. Next month, you'll find this popular feature in Fantastic, Amazing's companion-mag, which you'll be able to find everywhere Amazing is for sale—that is, if you aren't already a Fantastic reader. There are two reasons for the change. The new book-length novel that's being added, just doesn't leave room for the shorter features. Also, Fantastic has a more diversified readership, thus giving wider range to pen pal possibilities. So grab your copy of Fantastic next month and start making new friends.

JEANNIE BOWERS, 5500 60th ST., SACRAMENTO, CALIF. . . . Jeannie is 16 years old. She wants a pen pal very much, and she will also be happy to correspond with "pencil pals." She is 5'7" tall, has brown eyes and dusty brown hair. Her interests include photography and music.

GENE H. BRASHER, 6 LOEMAN ST., STRATHMORE, W. 6, MELBOURNE, VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA. . . . Gene has been a science fiction enthusiast for 7 years and he considers himself pretty much of an expert in the field. He is 17 years old, has blond hair. A member of the Melbourne s-f group, he also likes sports car racing and swing records.

MICHAEL W. CALAHAN, RT. 1, RUSTON, LA. . . . Michael is a college freshman, age 19, 6'1" tall, weighing 190 pounds. In addition to science fiction he also likes astronomy and popular music.

JAMES GUILERMO, RT. 2, BOX 459A GALT, CALIF. . . . James was so pleased with the response from other Space Club members as a result of his listing in the August issue, that he wants to appear again. He is a farm worker, 23 years old, has brown hair, brown eyes, weighs 190 pounds.

ALBERT HASKINS, V.A. HOSPITAL, WARD 16, BATTLE CREEK, MICH. . . . A science fiction fan for many years, Albert is 30 years old, 5'11" tall and single. He enjoys progressive jazz.

LOIS ANN HEALY, 151 HEATH ST., BUFFALO 14, NEW YORK . . . Lois is a junior in high school. She is interested in various phases of science. She's also enthusiastic about baseball.

ROY M. JONES, JR., 727 E. PEAR ST., ROSWELL, N. M. . . . E.S.P. and U.F.O.s are the facets of s-f that Roy likes best. He does a lot of exploring

and hunting. His hobby is photography. He is 26 years old, 5'9" tall, has blue eyes, brown hair.

RONALD KUPIN DP III, NASSAU COUNTY SANATORIUM, FARMINGDALE, L. I., N. Y. . . . Ronald is 29 years old, married and a reader of science fiction since 1938. Other hobbies: photography, electric railways, model railroads and travel.

FRANCES L. LIGHT, 3715 N. MARSHFIELD, CHICAGO 13, ILLINOIS . . . At 33 Frances is a housewife with two sons, a cat and tropical fish. She started reading s-f with the Oz books many years ago as a hobby. She has a question: Do many housewives read science fiction? She complains that she can't find any compatriots.

R. M. NEEDHAM, 708 N. MT. PLEASANT AVE., LANCASTER, OHIO . . . 40 years old, this s-f fan still holds membership in the old, but no longer active, 'Science Fiction League. He's been interested in s-f since the early 1930's. He's graphic arts instructor at the Ohio Boys' Industrial School. Hobbies: guns, shooting, collecting and selling U. S. stamps.

VINCENT PAPE, 1238 FLATBUSH AVE., BROOKLYN 26, N. Y. . . . As a member of The Space Club Vincent hopes to share his interest in outer space and satellites.

T. PATTISON, "SAN MICHELE," 3, TRIMBLESTON RD., BOOTERTOWN, CO. DUBLIN . . . This keen s-f fan has a collection of over 150 science fiction magazines. Lately she's had trouble getting some of the mags. May be some fellow Space Clubbers will be able to help her out. She's 17 years old, 5'9" tall, has red hair and blue eyes. She would like to compare Irish and Amer-

ican sports with other sports lovers from the States.

RICH REINHART, 608 CRUM CREEK RD., BROOMALL, PA. . . . Age 15, Rich's hobbies are U.F.O.s and coin collecting. He is looking forward to lots of mail.

BECKY RITTERMEYER, 700 ACADEMY ST., DALLAS, OREGON . . . Becky is 21 years old, married and a dance instructor. She wants to hear from everyone interested in E.S.P. and U.F.O.

MARGARET ANN RODGERS, 347 WEST SPAZIER AVE., BURBANK, CALIF. . . . In August Margaret's name appeared for the first time in The Space Club. She says that the response was so terrific that she wants to be sure that her new address is noted by old and new pen pals.

FRANK X. RURKA, 314 ARDEN RD., BALTIMORE 25, MD. . . . 15-year-old Frank has been enthusiastically studying about flying saucers. He would like to hear from other people interested in this aspect of s-f.

GENE STEPHENS, 10242 MINA AVE., WHITTIER, CALIFORNIA . . . Gene wants to correspond with members who have interests in common with his. He is an avid explorer, rock hound and reader of Amazing. From the rocks that he finds he makes knicknacks and lamps. He makes similar things from cacti, yucca and deadwood. He also collects fossils, and Indian relics.

DAN W. WILHITE, P.O. BOX 11, N. LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS . . . Dan's listing appeared in the November issue, but since then his address has been changed to the one above.

(Continued from page 5)

When our simple homemade ships get too numerous and I'm blamed for a not too original idea, I'll have stocked up on copies of *Amazing* and spent all my time dreaming of something a little faster.

Of course those who criticize your magazine aren't allowed any saucer because they should switch back to horse-opera magazines.

To heck with the old used-to-be s-f stories. I find an amazing variety of amazing stories in *Amazing* magazine. I like you, I'm in favor of spaceships and E.S.P.

Mrs. Laura McElroy
17613 Baltos St.
Northridge, Calif.

• Who knows, Mrs. McElroy, maybe the skies are full of "simple homemade ships" right now. Maybe that's what all the fuss is about.

Dear Editor:

I think your magazine is one of the best s-f mags. on the stands. I think Mr. Lesson's letter of last issue is unjust. Sure you print a few bad stories, but everybody makes mistakes. Personally, by the sound of Mr. Lesson's letter I don't even think he read your magazine (or can he read at all? Note his first sentence: "After trying to read 3 of your issues . . .)

If Mr. Lesson would care to comment on this letter my address follows.

F. P. Pauls
1448 Meridene Dr.
Baltimore 12, Md.

Dear Editor:

This is what comes of having one cover artist for so many years. Your typesetters can't break the habit of writing "Cover by Edward Valigursky." I suggest you get a new typesetter and keep Finlay.

Stuart Wheeler
728 Stout Ave.
Wyoming, Ohio

• We were really embarrassed about that error, but Finlay was a good sport about it.

Dear Ed:

How about some Shaver stories? How about some time and/or dimension travel stories? By the way, I think H. P. Lovecraft was

the greatest fantasy and science-fiction writer of all time. Anybody agree?

"Amazing But True" is not s-f and does not belong in your magazine.

George Wagner
39 Wilbers Lane
Fort Thomas, Kentucky

• We agree with you on H. P. Lovecraft, at least to the extent of naming him among the greatest. After all, some of the world's best writers have turned their attentions to this field.

Dear Editor:

As usual the November issue of *Amazing* was another star thriller. Every story was exceptional especially "Children of Chaos"; exciting to the last word.

The two new cartoon characters are O.K. I like your idea of spreading their various curiosity entanglements throughout the magazine. Something different!

W. C. Brandt
Apt. N
1725 Seminary Ave.
Oakland 21, Calif.

• We hope to be able to keep the short features when we start running our full-length book novel, but if you find some of them missing, we're sure you'll understand the reason. Lack of space.

Dear Ed:

I enjoyed your article in the October 1957 issue of *Amazing*, headlined "We Need Not Fear the Aliens," especially the last part beginning with "Our great need is love . . ." It was a pleasant surprise for me to learn that some clergy people are interested in s-f.

What I like best was the underlying philosophical idea, the living in the present, living without fear, etc. If more people would attempt to experience the present fully, less people would be so selfish, less people would be neurotics, and perhaps less people would be hallucinating their time away in the hospital where I am employed as a psychiatric nurse.

But it is not only the living in the past, many people try to escape the present by living in the future, always hoping for tomorrow, always waiting for next payday, next day off, letting the present, letting life slip by unlivéd, unrecognized.

But I was rather disappointed with the second-to-last paragraph of the article.

Although I believe that "very likely the beings inside the saucers are long beyond ours and we are simply making the flying saucers into symbols of our own terrors of the unknown," the statement that, "The flying saucers cannot be any threat to us because God would certainly not allow any form of life the power of space travel if their intent were hostile to other life . . ." seems rather ridiculous to me. (Not ridiculous, but ridiculous to me.)

But I cannot conceive a God that does not allow certain things. Some people say they don't believe in God. The reason, for instance, because their child was killed in an accident. "There is no God" they exclaim, "For He would never allow such an injustice." Is not this business of justice rather relative, to us anyway? Besides, if God were that all-guiding we would not need free will, nor conscience.

With such a God we would be mere puppets in a show, and I don't think we are, do you?

J. Frank Van Kampen
Weyburn, Sask.
Canada

• *No, sir, we don't think that for one moment. And we're sure that deep in their hearts, very few other people do either.*

Dear Editor:

I have just picked up the latest issue of *Fantastic* and *Amazing* Stories. Both are disappointments. Especially the letter column. Billy Meyers was the only true fan that had a letter appearing. All, or most of the names, are new. And most sound like infants expressing their evaluated praise in your honor.

Neither of your magazines are worth half of what they were two years ago. Every time someone asks: "Why don't you revive The Revolving Fan?" you ignore their question. Did it ever occur to you that maybe, just maybe, there are some who liked the fanzine reviews, and who missed them when you jerked the column from the pages of *Amazing*?

Sometimes I wonder if Hamling, Palmer and you are brothers. You all seem to follow the same pattern. When Browne left we might have guessed that some pretty drastic changes were to be made.

The whole quality of both your magazines has dropped over the past few months. Your editorials are trite. At least Palmer makes himself interesting in OW. That's more than you and Bill do. You three must have a coalition, or else are notorious copycats of each other.

You install "The Space Club"; Hamling turns around and puts in "The Cosmic Pen Club." Palmer heads off for flying saucer stuff;

you and Bill follow him blindly with flying saucer covers and stories. Now, the latest is, from Hamling, that you had Valigursky do a similar cover to one Bill used on *Imaginative Tales*.

What gives with you three? Haven't any of you any spunk? Afraid to act on your own? If that be the case, you better turn the magazines over to more qualified men.

Larry Sokol
4131 Lafayette Avenue
Omaha 31, Nebraska

● *But where could you find three more qualified men, Mr. Sokol? Or at least, two more qualified men?*

Dear Editor:

You know, I think you're really trying to raise *Amazing Stories* from the depths into which it sunk four or five years ago. Certainly a novelette like "Children of Chaos" is nothing to sneeze at.

But the other stories! The cover—O.K., but it was done better on the April '54 issue of *Fantastic*.

Now I've got a bone to pick with you. Whatever happened to all the great authors that made *Amazing* the magazine it is today? Where's Nelson Bond, Robert Moore Williams, Don Wilcox, Eando Binder (who let Adam Link go to an undeserved grave) David V. Reed, Bob Bloch, and many, many more? They can't all be dead.

A few other editors managed to get old-timers like Ed Hamilton and Tenneshaw back, along with Henry Hasse and even Fritz Leiber.

H. B.
2542 Drake
Chicago, Ill.

● *Those senior writers were great. We heartily agree. But what about the fine new writers who are coming along? They will be the beloved seniors of tomorrow.*

Dear Editor:

Thoroughly enjoyed November *Amazing*. I, too, disagree with Tryon's letter. My sentiments follow along the line of Ray Palmer (Oct. OW).

I think the letter section could be greatly enlarged and editorial comments on letters be elongated. Saw a lot of familiar names in the section this month.

Valigursky's cover artistry didn't impress me, as the cover definitely didn't sell me on this *Amazing*.

The special features in s-f zines are what I think round them

out and make them different from the rest of the crowd. (And boy, what a crowd of zines clutter the market these days.)

All in all, November issue sums up the praise of the readers: no more space opera in excess, good stories, and fairly good editorial policy.

Here's one to think over. Why not have editors of several s-f magazines get together to put out a combozine with all the good features of each? Not on a permanent basis necessarily, but a fast-selling zine to talk about in the future.

Vince Roach
3443 South Sadlier Rd.
Indianapolis 19, Indiana

• *We're afraid your pooling idea would hardly be practical. It would be the same as asking Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler to collaborate on a car. Hmm. Wonder what the car would look like.*

Dear Editor:

Well, another year has rolled around and this time it's the best since 1954.

'57 started off with a fair serial, and the first E. K. Jarvis in years. G. Vance then appeared with a very good story. R. M. Williams returned with a fair short. (Say, how about a novel from him?) Garrett came up with a mediocre novelette, and Arnette gave us the best story of the year. Also, my first letter.

H. Beam Piper gave us the tremendous "Edge of the Knife," in May. Then came a hackneyed plot for "The Steel Napoleon" by Ellison. July provided the cramped, but excellent "A God Named Smith." August was a lousy issue. September evidenced the best Valigursky all year and a good story to match. (Shame, Paul, for stealing this from *Madge*.)

October was terrible, but November came back a little. December—almost excellent: good cover, good lead story.

More Finlay covers would be welcome. Also how about bullwhipping Fairman into writing a novel?

Don Kent
3800 Wellington
Chicago, Illinois

• *Actually, the Sept. cover wasn't stolen from Madge. The true story of what happened is too incredible to rate belief, so we're dropping the subject.*

NEXT MONTH:— 16 More Pages — New Features

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A powerful, book-length novel you'll long remember, complete in the March issue of the new, expanded *Amazing*. Here is science fiction at its best. You'll get the startling answers to:

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